



Sidhis and Scholars

Essays on African Indians



Edited by

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy

Edward A. Alpers

This exciting collection of essays brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines to explore the history and present circumstances of one of India's least known minority groups, the African Indians.

Following the editors' introduction which covers the scholarly literature on Africans in India and an historical overview that looks at the larger history of Africans in India, the essays focus on two different communities of African Indians, the Sidis of Gujarat (including those in Bombay) and the Siddis of Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. They illumine various aspects of the life of Sidis in contemporary India, their worship at the Sufi shrine of Gori Pir, their music and dance, their liminal existence and their agonising dilemmas and predicament in the complex mosaic that is present-day India.

Co-edited by an ethnomusicologist of India and an historian of Africa, the contributors include specialists in anthropology, archaeology, art history, religious studies and film from Ghana, Sweden, Germany, the United States and India. Together, they bring to bear their wealth of research experience and scholarship in Africa and India on the fascinating and varied experience of Indians of African origin.

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Essays on African Indians

Edited by

Amy C. K. Jaisankar

Edward A. Spicer



RAINBOW
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Sidis and Scholars

Essays on African Indians

Kamar Badshah Sidi (1927-2000)

Edited by

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy

Edward A. Alpers



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Sidis and Scholars Essays on African Indians

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Dedicated to
Kamar Badshah Sidi (1927–2000)

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of the Indian Ocean

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Sidis and the Agate Bead Industry of Western India

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Twenty Years at the Shrine of Gudi Pir

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A Note on Protection of Subjects

The present volume attempts to protect the identity of speakers, places, and communities in most cases. In other cases, where reference is made to a statement made in a public forum, or where someone has given permission to be quoted, the speaker's name is given in full.

A Note on Orthography

Words in Indian languages are largely retained in the orthography of the individual author, with some attempt at consistency throughout the volume. We apologise for any unintended deviations from standardisation in spellings of words and in names of places and people.

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Foreword

It was in the early 1980s that I first heard of the Sidis. Helene Basu, who had then come to do fieldwork in Gujarat, told me that she planned to work among the Sidis. This aroused my curiosity. I began looking at sources where one might find something about them. Through this initial exploration, I learned that the Sidis were a people of African origin who had managed through the centuries to maintain their racial distinctiveness as well as their African cultural traits and were now scattered in several parts of India, from Gujarat to Karnataka.

This is where my knowledge about the Sidis stood until Helene Basu asked me if I would be willing to travel to her field area. She was encountering problems establishing rapport with the Sidis and thought that my going there might break the ice with the Sidi informants and facilitate her work. This afforded me an opportunity to see the Sidis. I decided to travel to Gujarat.

Helene Basu had come down from her field area to Baroda to receive me. She suggested that I stay a couple of days in Baroda before proceeding to her field area. She must have thought that, being resident in Delhi, too abrupt an exposure to the run down countryside of South Gujarat might produce a culture shock. However, my enthusiasm to see the Sidis was so strong that the following day we set out for Gori Pir village, where Helene Basu had settled down for her fieldwork. Later, I learnt that Gori Pir Hill was a special place for the Sidis. The shrine of Gori Pir, the patron saint of the Sidis, is situated close to the village. Also, the village had been blessed by the saint and its stone, on whose collection many poor Sidis survived, yielded agate.

Accompanied by Helene Basu, I went to the shrine and met a prominent local Sidi who had apparently not taken kindly to a foreigner, that too white, coming and settling down in their midst on the 'pretext' of writing a book about their life and culture. What is so special about us Sidis? We are like other Indians. Why should she choose to focus on us when we are no different from the others? These were his words. He was a *qawwal* (singer of Sufi music) and gave musical recitals at the shrine which was the main source of his subsistence. Rather than answering his barrage of questions, I shifted the conversation to the art of *qawwali* and its ritual significance in Sufism. As this conversation went on, his initial suspicions began to subside. He began opening up and talking about the predicaments of an average Sidi.

It is true that the Sidis are today like all other Indians, being one of the many groups whose ancestors came to this country and made it their home. However, having lived in the area for a couple of days, I became increasingly conscious of a striking contrast between the Sidis and the local people. This contrast was not only in terms of physical features, though that is certainly striking as the Sidis are of African descent and have retained their racial characteristics even after close intermixing with the local populations. It was a contrast in terms of self-perceptions, worldviews and lifestyles. Unlike other groups in the midst of whom they have lived for centuries, the Sidis are neither religiously rigid nor too deeply concerned with flaunting their religious identity as Muslims. Some of them perform prayers, keep the annual fasts and observe other Islamic rituals and festivals, but the hub of their religious life is the shrine of Gori Pir where they pay obeisance to the saint through performance of the *dammal*, that recalls the typical African drum dance.

This sets them apart from the other groups, particularly the other groups among the Muslims, who see the Sidis as some inferior category of Muslims to be redeemed through vigorous efforts to Islamise them. Within the few days that I was in Gori Pir village, I could discern a sense of discomfort among both Sidis and other Muslim groups in the area whose beliefs and ritual practices are more Islamised. I sensed that the Sidis took pride in their African descent and felt confident about the intrinsic worth of their culture which, while influenced by Islamic elements, was at the same time more eclectic and

open to outside influences. Other Muslim groups saw the Sidis as some kind of pagans to be civilised through infusing them with a heavier dose of what they considered to be Islam, or at least according to Islam as they understood it. This growing pressure is subjecting the Sidis to a dilemma of choosing one or the other identity as primary and starting to live according to it. Luckily, the Sidi sense of pride in their culture and their faith in a form of Sufism suited to their daily needs has made them resist such religious homogenisation.

One question which had occurred to me during the few days that I was in Gori Pir village was how the Sidis struck a balance between their distinctive identity as Sidis, given that the Sidis are divided among Muslims, Christians and Hindus, and their religious identity as Muslims. Was there an attempt on the part of the Sidis to reinforce their distinctive cultural identity by forming alliances across their division between Muslim, Christian and Hindu sections? Or, was the wedge between Muslim, Christian and Hindu sections consolidating because of a deepening thrust among the orthodox of all religious traditions to suck the Sidis into the vortex of an over-arching religious identity and reinforce a sense of being exclusively Muslim, Christian or Hindu? I had no answer to this question at the time as I had no familiarity with Christian and Hindu Sidis. Charles Camara illumines this when he writes: 'Perhaps the major change that has taken place among the Sidis relates to the concept of *Siddiance zat*, meaning the Sidi people... Today most of the Sidis regard that they are more united and have better interaction regardless of religious and linguistic affiliation.'

Built upon sentiments of race, history and culture, this consolidation on the basis of a Sidi identity is a necessity for the Sidis in the contemporary context. The Sidis are an extremely marginalised community whom the stream of economic development has virtually passed by. Under the circumstances, the Sidis are left with few choices than to consolidate themselves to count for more in the public realm and to bring about pressure on the state to begin to address their situation. What the analyses presented in this book so powerfully bring out is that the role of the state has been remarkably dubious. Even if the Sidis are deeply united by their distinctive racial, cultural and historical self-perception, the thrust of the state has been towards pigeon-holing them into readymade categories which it finds easier

to deal with. One example of the role of the state is captured by Helene Basu's description of the physical transformation of the Gor Pir shrine from a thatched hut to a monumental structure radiating Islam. Other examples are the way affirmative action provisions have been differently applied to the Sidis and the changes in forest policies which have virtually forced the Sidis to end up doing low paid jobs in an urban setting.

A series of substantial historical and ethnographic issues is entailed in a study of a community formed over time through successive waves of migration and dispersed in different parts of the country. This book illumines several tricky and controversial themes in relation to the origin, migration, identity and livelihood of the Sidis and raises several new questions for future research. The editors and the authors deserve our gratitude for this remarkable undertaking to enlighten us about a community about which so little is known and reminding us that India remains a diverse and plural society at a time when that pluralism is severely on trial.

Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi

Imtiaz Ahmad

Acknowledgments

The inspiration for this volume of essays comes from many quarters. Arnold Bake's 1932 and 1938 recordings of Sidis and Chaush made in Hyderabad, Gujarat, and the Makran, followed by his student Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy's recordings of Pakistani Sidis for the Smithsonian in 1975 and 1976, first piqued Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy's interest in this community. For Ned Alpers the starting point was the pioneering work of Joseph Harris in the early 1970s and his current wider research on the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean. Helene Basu and Beheroze Shroff led our way to the Sidi communities in Gujarat and Bombay. Their guidance and generosity in sharing their research were essential to the success in April 2000 of the Rajpipla conference from which most of the papers originate. We are especially grateful to all the Sidis whose support and generosity made this work possible. Their receptiveness to the research of all the contributors was an inspiring factor, and they continue to collaborate with us in the field. The interest of our American students was also compelling, especially among African-Americans, as the African Indian experience gave them a new idea of India through comparison of the westward diaspora with the eastward diaspora in the Indian Ocean. Our colleagues at UCLA gave great encouragement to the project. Al Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts gave freely of their insights from their Africanist perspective on the Indian Ocean and their own experiences in Hyderabad, while Chris Ehret and Tom Hinnebusch provided insights into the Bantu and Swahili puzzles we encountered. Gyanam Mahajan gave bountifully of her Hindi expertise to Amy for the opening statement to the Sidis,

as well as others including Nazir Jairazbhoy and Kusum Madgaokar. Both of us wish to thank Charles Camara for his important contribution to the section of the 'Introduction' on 'The History of Sidi Studies.' Finally, the royal family of Rajpipla, the erstwhile Maharaja of Rajpipla Raghbir Singhji Gohil, Maharani Rukmani Devi of Rajpipla, and Yuvraj Manvendra Singh Gohil and their staff worked tirelessly to organise and host the conference. Undeterred by recalcitrant fax machines, not to mention droughts, famines, and the Central Government's eventual denial of a significant portion of the funds promised at the outset, loss of which our hosts were eventually forced to bear—all this we acknowledge here with our deep gratitude. They deserve the highest praise for enabling us to organise the original conference and for themselves entering into the collaborative fray of Sidis and scholars.

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy
Edward A. Alpers

भूमिका

अन्जामबो!

सीदी भाइयों और बहनों, अस सलाम अलैकुम!

सन् 1999 में हमने इन्तज़ाम शुरू किया — सीदी कांफ्रेंस के लिए, राजपीपला में। राजा-रानी के यहां मेज़बान थे। इसमें कम से कम तीन-चार सौ सीदी भाई और बहन आए थे — कच्छ, गुजरात, मुम्बई और करनाटक से। दस-बारह देसी-परदेसी आचार्य लोगों और उस्तादों के भाषण इस किताब में हैं और दूसरों के भी।

2000 में “सीदी गोमा कांफ्रेंस” हुआ था। पूरी दुनिया में सीदी लोग रहते हैं। अमरीका में बहुत सीदी लोग हैं। आजकल उनको “अफ्रीकन-अमरीकन” या “ब्लैक पीपल” (काले लोग) कहा जाता है। वे पहले ज़माने में गुलाम थे, फिर हमारे सबसे प्यारे प्रेसीडेंट इबराहीम लिंकन ने उन्हें आज़ादी दी — एक सौ पच्चास साल पहले। मगर आज तक अमरीकी समाज में सीदी लोगों को काफी मुश्किलें हैं। इसलिये बहुत लोग और कई संस्थान अमरीका में उनकी मदद कर रहे हैं। चालीस साल पहले, मेरे बचपन के दौरान चल रहा था हमारा “सिविल राइट्स मूवमेन्ट” — एक आंदोलन अफ्रीकन-अमरीकनों के हक साबित करने के लिए, और उन लोगों के साथ एकता दिखाने के लिए। इस आंदोलन का मुझ पर बहुत असर हुआ। सुना है और देखा भी है कि आप सब की ज़िंदगी भारत में भी काफी मुश्किल है। इस वजह से सीदी लोगों से जान-पहचान करना चाहती हूं।

एक दूसरा मसला है कि आपमें से बहुत से लोग सूफी मुसलमान हैं। आजकल दुनिया में इस्लाम बहुत अहम चीज़ होने पर भी लोगों की समझ में कहीं न कहीं गलतियां होती हैं। अमरीका और यूरोप में बहुत लोगों को सूफी इस्लाम पसंद है और वे इसके बारे में जानना चाहते हैं। जैसा आप जानते हैं गोरी शाह पीर बहुत ऊंचे फ़कीर थे और उनकी तालीम दुनिया में मशहूर बनानी चाहिए। आप यह भी जानते हैं कि माई मिश्रा, बावा हबाश, सीदी मुक्ता, बावा हसन, नक्कारची पीर, सब बहुत मशहूर सीदी फ़कीर थे। दुनिया में बहुत कम लोग सीदियों की बातें जानते हैं। इसलिए, हमने आपके इतिहास और जीवन के बारे में इस किताब में लिखा है। हमारी अपनी पढ़ाई के वक्त, हमने बहुत सीदियों के साथ बात-चीत की — गुजरात में, महाराष्ट्र, कर्नाटक और हैदराबाद में। आप लोग शायद जानते हैं कि मैं और मेरे शौहर नज़ीर अली जैराज़भाई दोनों संगीत और लोकगीत, इतिहास और धरम-मज़हब भी पढ़ते हैं। खासतौर पर आप के दमाल और ज़िकर के बारे में हम सिखाते और लिखते हैं। दोनों पूरी दुनिया में खास चीज़ें हैं। इस वजह से हमने आप लोगों के साथ काम किया सीदी CD बनाने के लिए।

इस किताब में, सब लेखकों ने आप लोगों के रीति-रिवाजों को समझने की कोशिश की है और वे आपकी तहज़ीब को फैलाना चाहते हैं।

इंशा-अल्लाह आप लोग भी इस किताब को पढ़ेंगे और मुमकिन है कि पढ़कर आपके इतिहास, आजकल की ज़िन्दगी, और आप के भविष्य के बारे में नए ख्याल भी आयेंगे।

एमी कैटिलन-जैराज़भाई

Note: A partial English translation appears on pages 199–200.

Introduction

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A. Alpers

Preparing: Seeking the Participation of the Observed

Participant observation is an established research methodology in anthropology, in which an observer participates in the activities of an observed culture, usually in a passive, non-interfering role. The objective of participant observation is to disturb normal social dynamics as little as possible, while mimicking cultural processes in order to understand them better. The present volume represents an attempt to alter that formula by including the active participation of the observed in the design and execution of research. We interviewed Sidis¹ to give voice to their subaltern perspectives, and worked alongside them to design and implement research that they found interesting and useful. Known as Participatory Action Research by anthropologists, the goal of such experiments is to enable culture members to create and participate in the types of research that they consider constructive and valuable for their own purposes.² The philosophy behind the conference *Sidis at the Millennium: History, Culture, and Development*, and many of the papers presented here, embrace this method.

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Jairazbhoy³ began their research with Sidis near the former royal state of Rajpipla⁴ in January 1999. Their village had long come under the former Rajpipla state's jurisdiction until administrative lines were redrawn after Independence and the village came under Bharuch district. This was followed by the recent formation of the new Narmada district, of which Rajpipla is the capital, but it does not include the Sidi village known in this book as Gori Pir Hill.⁵ The Maharani, H.H. Rukmani Devi Gohil of

Rajpipla, who hails from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, was interested in meeting her husband's ancestors' former constituents, and asked to accompany the Jairazbhoys to the Sidi shrine during their weekly *jumerat* rituals. The Sidis received her for the first time that day as the bride of their hereditary patron with appropriate rituals, welcoming her interest in their situation. They expressed concerns revolving around a land grant from a previous Maharaja (her husband's ancestors) that was voided by the Central Government of India after Independence. That evening when Amy suggested that the Rajpipla family hold a conference on Sidis in their palace hotel to discuss such matters, the Maharani energetically agreed, provided that we organised it and arranged foreign participation. Because of the Rajpipla family's longstanding *jajmani* (hereditary patron/client) relations with the Sidis within their realm for many centuries, as well as their commitment to maintaining the tribal and folk traditions of their region, they agreed to shoulder the major burdens of organisation and hospitality. This was done through their Sri Laxminathji Trust, a small educational and cultural foundation especially for minorities in their district.⁶ The organisers discussed the idea with the local Sidis and they enthusiastically agreed to invite Sidis throughout Gujarat to participate in the discussions and to arrange activities at the shrine. To celebrate the decision they invited a Sidi *qawwali* group to perform their Sufi devotional music in the palace hotel for the royal family and guests—a first since Independence.⁷

Then in March 1999 Jairazbhoys went to the Sidi area of northern Karnataka and met Charles Camara and his collaborator Sivappa Pujari, Director of the local Sidi Development Association, and their many Sidi associates. They invited them to the Rajpipla conference to present their applied research-in-progress among the Karnataka Sidis, on which Charles was preparing a dissertation for Stockholm University.

Upon Jairazbhoys' return to UCLA in April, 1999 Indian Ocean historian Edward Alpers kindly agreed to collaborate in the organisation of the conference, and his contributions were essential to its success. We invited many interested scholars from the West and those who could manage it attended the conference. We also provided a list of Indian scholars for the Rajpipla hosts to invite, including Imtiaz Ahmad, authority on Muslim minorities, but due to various difficul-

ties in communication and the shortfall of government funding, most of them could not be present. There are only a few experts on Sidis in India to our knowledge, including historians R.R.S. Chauhan and Shanti Sadiq Ali, Gujarat researchers T.B. Naik and G.P. Pandya, and Karnataka scholars T.C. Palakshappa and Kiran Kamal Prasad (formerly known as Cyprian Lobo), and their absence was regretted. During that summer, Raghubir Singhji Gohil of Rajpipla came to UCLA to discuss the arrangements for the conference. Helene Basu also visited from Berlin, and we considered the conference plans, her pioneering and prodigious anthropological writings on the Sidis, and the choice of her paper topic: the legal battle over the loss of Sidi leadership of their main shrine, an ideal example of Participatory Action Research presented in her paper in this volume.

Less than one year from its inception, the conference *Sidis at the Millennium: History, Culture, and Development* took place in February 2000. The participation of the observed was a key feature in this unique assembly of Sidi African Indians from all walks of life, foreign and Indian researchers, and the local press and television. Sidis and scholars together addressed the changing roles and needs of African Indians over the centuries during the conference. Generously hosted by H.H. Raghubir Singhji Gohil and Rukmani Devi Gohil of Rajpipla, with their son, Manvendra Singh Gohil,⁸ the conference was held on the premises of their palace hotel, with a second day at the nearby Sidi shrine. Over three hundred Sidis participated from throughout Gujarat, as well as from Bombay, with representatives also from the Sidi Development Association of Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. These included the Sidi (ex-) *nawab* of the former principality of Sachin, Sidi Nawab Dr. Nasruddin Khan, with his *begum*, their sons and grandchildren, the (ex-) *nawab* of the former state of Cambay, Nawab Mirza Mohammad Jafar Ali Khan and his *begum*, and the (ex-) *nawab* of Balasinor, Nawab Mohammad Salabat Khan Babi. The participation of these learned dignitaries lent a unique perspective on the social history of Sidis, who were often associated with royal patrons in Gujarat until the disbanding of the princely states five decades ago. At that time, most of the former *jajmani* (patron-client) relationships disintegrated between the royal families and the Sidis, and we saw the conference as a public forum for reuniting these disassociated communities.

Scholar Voices

Five of the papers published here in revised form were delivered formally in English during the first morning session to a small audience of journalists, scholars, and Sidis, after introductory remarks by the hosts and former *nawabs*. Two of the scholars have devoted a major portion of their careers to researching the Sidis of Gujarat. Anthropologist Helene Basu lived for two years in a Sidi village studying religious expression in a vernacular Islamic cult to the black Sufi saint, Gori Pir, and wrote a pathbreaking study of their beliefs and practices (Basu 1995). Filmmaker Beheroze Shroff, an Indian-American who participated in Sidi religious observances since childhood, is in the midst of producing a documentary film on Sidi ethnic identity. Two papers were by South Asianists who had come to the subject of Sidis relatively recently: one by archaeologists Jonathan Mark Kenoyer and Kuldeep Bhan, and another by ethnomusicologist Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, whose collaborator Nazir Jairazbhoy had conducted fieldwork among Shidis in Pakistan. Indian-Swedish graduate student Charles Camara had worked in Goa before focusing his doctoral research-in-progress on the Sidis of northern Karnataka. Historian Edward Alpers contributed a wider perspective on the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean. The seventh and senior member of the conference, Jayanti Patel, *emeritus* faculty member from Gujarat University, had written on Sidis previously and provided his seasoned approach in Gujarati and English during the second day. To these six, three papers have been added by Africanist scholars unable to attend the conference, but whose interests all happened to converge on Sidi cultural performance: recent research in Karnataka by Ghanaian Pashington Obeng from the field of comparative religion, from art historian Henry Drewal whose major work had been in Nigeria and Brazil, and recent observations of Sidis in Gujarat by the young art historian Prita Meier.⁹

Many significant issues arose from the morning papers. In addition to locating Sidis in the larger context of the Indian Ocean African diaspora, Alpers highlighted the need for further historical research on African communities in South Asia. Kenoyer and Bhan's slide presentation affirmed the foundations of the Sidi involvement in the agate trade in the Indian Ocean, in which Sidis played a central role until recent decades. Basu decried the marginalisation of Sidi

power in the struggle for legal and ritual control over the shrine to the Sidi saint/ancestor/business leader Gori Pir. Catlin addressed the scope and possible consequences of globalisation and development of Sidi music for economic and community benefit, using video examples from various diasporised African communities. Camara underscored the pervasive discrimination and prejudice that limits the Sidi community's access to education, development, and power in Karnataka.

In the afternoon, an audience of some 300 Sidi participants gathered in a *shamiana*¹⁰ in front of the palace for presentations in the Gujarati language. Local Hindu girls danced a prayer to Saraswati, the goddess of music and learning, and tossed flower petals on everyone present. Rukmani Devi sang a song of welcome and universal love in *Kalavati rag*, and spoke of her desire to bring the Sidis into her family's life and activities. These welcoming rituals from the Hindu hosts to the Muslim Sidi audience were much appreciated as significant symbolic gestures of reconciliation and rapprochement.

With the morning's speakers seated on the stage, a young Gujarati Muslim history professor, Dr. Rizvan Kadri of the Swaminarayan College, Ahmedabad, used local languages to describe the composite nature of Sidi culture as exemplified in his recent research on song texts. He read aloud a Sidi song text for Holi describing the Hindu deity Krishna, noting that it exemplified Hindu-Muslim unity, which elicited enthusiastic applause from the largely Sidi audience. He then summarised the morning's papers in Hindi/Urdu/Gujarati, the local languages best understood by Gujarati Sidis. He commented on and interpreted each paper, and requested responses from the audience, generating a lively discussion that lasted long into the night.

Visual materials from the morning's session were then re-screened and explained for the audience. American archaeologist Kenoyer presented his slides on the agate trade, and later offered to help the Sidis to return to their ancestors' calling, and to help them set up a website for this purpose, similar to the one he uses to market agate throughout the world from this region. One Sidi asked how they could reconnect with the agate trade, and Kenoyer suggested the (ex-) *nawab* of Cambay might be willing to help to connect them with the artisans in Cambay. He also proposed that some Sidis migrate to East Africa to continue Gori Pir's work, since many Gujarati merchants had been

sent away from East Africa in recent years leaving a vacuum to be filled. As a result, he pointed out, African people are now compelled to buy their traditional objects made of plastic imitations of agate, although they said they would much prefer agate.

Beheroze Shroff presented her film-in-progress entitled 'Sidi Identity Formation in Gujarat,' which stimulated a lively dialogue on her sympathetic representation of Sidis and those usually seen in the media. After viewing the video, Professor Makrand Mehta, retired history professor from Ahmedabad University, problematised the identity of Gori Pir. He called attention to two aspects of Gori Pir's identity, the first religious and the second economic. The first aspect includes the trial by ordeal¹¹ conducted every week at the shrine, which is regarded by modernists as old-fashioned and related to superstition and witchcraft. The second aspect, economic, is exemplified in Gori Pir's great entrepreneurial talents in developing the agate business among Sidis, who dominated the trade until Independence when land rights were reassigned. The emphasis today seems to be on religious tradition, but Professor Mehta asked, 'Is there any modernisation possible in this tradition?' The group pondered the question, and whether it is primarily the renunciate's vow of poverty,¹² Gori Pir's entrepreneurial leadership in the agate trade, or their connections with Africa, that the Sidi community chooses to privilege in forming its identity.

Sidi Voices

At least a dozen Sidis came to the microphone and spoke, some at great length, about their aspirations and concerns, which tended to centre on their needs for education, employment, and specialised training, especially in sports and the military. Government classification was a major concern, as in the state of Gujarat they are classified as a Scheduled Tribe only within parts of Saurashtra, which allows them many benefits for education and employment. Several speakers supported the goal of inter-regional cooperation, involving Kacch, Saurashtra, Gujarat, Bombay, and Karnataka, and the need for an All-India Sidi Association was strongly advocated.

The following comments, mostly delivered in Gujarati, are paraphrased from the video recording of the discussion, with the generous help of Manvendra Singh Gohil.

First, the late Sidi Kamar Badshah, a respected elder leader of the community, spoke eloquently and with lavish gestures on the honour bestowed on Sidis in the past, and gave us some insight into the self-perceptions and aspirations of Sidis today.

Our ancestors were bodyguards to the Maharajas, and tasted their food before they ate. We Sidis were sitting on a treasure-trove of agate in those days, but nowadays if we could only get 'royalties' for the agate being taken away by others today, we would be grateful. Even better, the government should give us back the rights to the agate fields.

We perform our sacred dances for others, but they treat us like tribals. Saurashtran Sidis are treated better than we are,¹³ and yet we all belong to the same communities and send our daughters in marriage in both directions.

Other communities have become involved in the administration of the Gori Pir shrine. I swear to tell the truth about those events—they can cut off my head if they want! Now the case has gone to court. Helene (Basu) knows the names involved.

A Sidi businessman in Bombay, Sidi Babu Jumma, appealed to the audience to collect funds to form an association, rather than depending on others to fund their development. He also offered to help Beheroze Shroff with her film, as he makes films every year in Zanzibar.

An upper-level employee of Indian Railways living in Mumbai, Sikandar Badshah, a college graduate, emphasised the suitability of Sidis as policemen, watchmen, and security guards, because of their predominant character trait of loyalty, one of the positive ethnic attributes given to them by non-Sidis as well. This was epitomised in his statement, 'Only we could stand outside the bedroom of maharajas.' He decried their classification as Bakshi Panc (one of the categories for tribals) in South Gujarat because the benefits are fewer than for Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes.

As military men in the princely states, our pensions were terminated after Independence, except by the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was the last to merge. We were forgotten by our former rulers and by the Central Government. Here in Gujarat, we have unity through Gori Pir, but we couldn't unite throughout India, although we have tried. I plan to visit Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to try again to lay the foundations for an all-India association of Sidis.

We all come from different parts of Africa, you can see that by 'face-reading'. See, Kamarbhai looks like Viv Richards¹⁴ in his youth, whose

ancestors came to the West Indies from the Sudan for sugar cultivation. Badshah Baba looks like Nelson Mandela, a South African.

Helene Basu then asked the question, 'What do you Sidis want?' to which Sikandar Badshah replied,

When Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, he asked us the same question. We answered, 'Sports training.' Margaret Talwar opened a sports complex only for Sidis in 1988, because we are fit for that, and get Olympic medals when other Indians can't, just like in America, where most of the top athletes are Sidis.¹⁵

Maharani Rukmani Devi asked if they knew of the national physical education training complex in Rajpipla. They did not, but asked how to obtain the application forms. There was general agreement on the priority of sports and military or police training, while the consensus seemed to be that the agate business is too restricted by government regulations.

A speaker from Bhuj cited the lack of benefits in his district of Kacch. He raised another well-known Sidi occupation in the past: driving. 'My father was employed as a driver. He drove for Nehru and Indira Gandhi when they came to Kacch.'

One of Sidi leaders of Gori Pir village and a Congress Party activist, Haidar Badshah, said, 'Please, all us Sidis must educate our children, whether or not we receive subsidies.'

Sivappa Poojary of the Yellapur Sidi Association in northern Karnataka described his methods of bringing unity to Sidis. 'Now education has risen from 3 per cent to 95 per cent among Sidi children. Cultural activities such as performances are given priority, and we think that these performances play an important role in the rising education levels.'

One foreign scholar doubted the value of performing in cultural programs, saying that the *dammal* is authentic, but that the costumes and performances are not. This was met with strong objection from the Sidis. This could be because Sidi performances in Gujarat are derived from their worship of Gori Pir, and are perceived by the Sidis as a modern extension of their traditional role as *fakirs*, wandering religious mendicants who celebrate their Sufi saint through music and dance.

A Sidi dance leader, Sabbir Kamarbhai Sidi, spoke in appreciation of Catlin's video footage of performances by various diasporic

‘Sidis’ (as he called them) outside their region whom they had never encountered or imagined, from Karnataka, the Gulf, and Brazil. He noted similarities in movement style, instruments, and music, which gave them a sense of global connection to other African diasporas.

A local Sidi, Babu Sidi, spoke in Hindi.

I don’t know whether I’m dreaming, or that it is really a conference about Sidis. As children we used to imagine such things, but I’m not yet sure it is actually happening. In 1960, Jawaharlal Nehru’s time, this education system started. Before, we just lived in the jungle. No money. But today even for schools you need money. And for any business you need money.

Three college-educated Sidi women attended,¹⁶ but only one Sidi woman, Rumanaben Sidi, a retired teacher of the Quran from Ahmedabad, spoke.

Whatever has been printed in newspapers about Sidis is intended to deceive. We keep seeing in the papers that things are being done for us, but in reality, there’s nothing. Nothing has been done for our community. We are grateful that the organisers have brought our community together here, but I would like to request that you help our people to get employment in any factories, as unemployment is a great problem for us... Sidis are not well-educated, and we don’t know how to present our views to the government, and those who are educated don’t take any interest. We may be poor, but we still try to maintain our dignity. Please give us any jobs possible.

As this statement suggests, the loss of upwardly mobile Sidis who reject their traditions and their community once they become more educated and affluent is often lamented by those left behind.

In Ritual Space

On the second day we all made a scholar’s pilgrimage by bus to the Sidi *dargah*¹⁷ about 40 miles from the palace hotel. We walked up the long bank of steps that are used for trials every week by those who seek Gori Pir’s powers of meting out justice, as well as by pilgrims of all sorts. Ritual performances took place before the tomb, with incense, drumming, and the *dammal* dance at the entrance to the shrine. We then entered the *shamiana* tent erected nearby for the occasion. A painted banner proclaimed ‘All India Sidi Association’ in Hindi and English, from a now-defunct organisation that lasted for a few years around the 1980s, until its founder and leader was recently killed. The sign served as a reminder of the hopes of achieving Sidi

unity which have since gone into dormancy, perhaps now being reignited by outsiders' interest. Kamar Badshah then led a group of Sidis in singing a seated *dammal* (also called *jikr*) to Gori Pir attributed to his grandfather. Many children participated, shouting their words in full voices, testament to continuing cross-generational transmission of Sidi devotional materials and practices.

There was a break for lunch, and while Sidis enjoyed a feast among their relatives arranged for them on Gori Pir Hill by the Rajpipla hosts, the foreigners and local scholars were transported to the closest town. There they were hosted in the home of a local Rajasthani related to the Maharani, Dilip Singh Chauhan, who contributed a major amount of work to organise the physical arrangements for the conference. His son, a Congress Party worker who conducts political activities with some Sidis, also participated in the arrangements.

On reuniting at the top of the hill, Sidis danced the *dammal* outside the shrine beside the *shamiana* in Africanised costumes with peacock feathers used for their touring performances.¹⁸ Scholars and royal guests seated in the places of honour were joined by pilgrims standing in a circle around the dancers, while some non-Sidi pilgrims danced on the fringes and entered ecstatic states.

In the later stages of the dance, after the choreographed sections, observers entered the *dammal* circle to join in the dancing. Among those brought inside was the Maharaja of Rajpipla, who was ritually blessed by the late Kamar Badshah. In a reversal of roles in which the Sidis specialise, his sacred authority at that moment surpassed the Maharaja's worldly powers. Kamar then lifted the crown prince, Manvendra Singh of Rajpipla, dancing while carrying him in his arms in a display of Sidi loyalty.

Returning under the *shamiana* after the revelry in Gori Pir's honour, as well as to honour the guests, two scholars from Ahmedabad, Sushilaben Thakkar of Chinmoyanand Mission and Jayantibhai K. Patel of Gujarat University, delivered talks in Gujarati. One concerned Sufism and music, and the other related the need to generate self-respect among Sidis. Professor Patel emphasised the importance of raising Sidi literacy and economic levels, citing their fame as 'guarantors of safety on the Indian Ocean' as quoted from Ibn Battuta's writings, which received applause. He closed by quoting Aniruddh Gupta's characterisation of maritime societies on India's

coasts as more liberal and tolerant than the tradition-bound inlanders linked to powerful states, and his paper concludes our volume.

Then the open discussions began, and more Sidi voices emerged. The young Karnatakan, Juje Sidi, spoke in Hindi about the Sidi Development Association he represents. Again there was discussion, including inquiries into the possibilities of intermarriage between Gujarati and Karnatak Sidis. Juje Sidi asked if a Karnataka Sidi girl would be able to come to Gujarat to marry a Muslim Sidi, even if she were Christian or Hindu. A young Gujarati Sidi, Yunus Babu, replied, 'We are all *black people*. We love one another no matter what our religion is.' He spoke the italicised words in English, indicating awareness of the black movement in the West, and a sense of membership in the same movement. This statement of pan-Sidi bonds received enthusiastic applause. While Sidis of different religions do sometimes intermarry in Karnataka, Sidis in Gujarat usually discourage intermarriage with non-Sidis. This advocacy of inter-religious intermarriage suggests that Sidis may observe a unique form of caste in which biological characteristics (racial features) and historical origins (from Africa) are a primary determinant for marital alliances, rather than kinship relationships based on religious considerations as in classic Hindu, and in turn Muslim, practices.

In a magnanimous gesture, the attorney son of the Sidi (ex-) *nawab* of Sachin offered *pro bono* legal aid to the Sidis of Gori Pir *dargah* in the ongoing court case concerning the administrative and ritual control of the *dargah*, the case discussed in Helene Basu's paper in this volume.

A solo dancer from Jamnagar, Horavar Matki Fari, fascinated the audience with a stylised parody of Indian classical *kathak* dance as he embodied a sung narrative of Gori Pir's travels to India. Badshah Babu Jumma's narrative song imitated the *rags* and *tals* of classical court music, accompanied on the Sidi *malunga*, a musical bow originating in Africa.

Music and discussion ended when the Sidi *muezzin* began to recite the evening call to prayer on the loudspeakers and most of the Sidi men went to the mosque attached to the *dargah* to pray.

Aftermath

There was considerable media coverage of the conference in the days that followed. A local *Indian Express* ran an article,¹⁹ emphasising

the debate over the inconsistent use of the Scheduled Tribe classification for Sidis within Gujarat and elsewhere, which has now been addressed (see Camara article in this volume). The local Gujarati television station covered the event in a broadcast that commandeered all local channels for several hours. This included interviews in Hindi with the various erstwhile maharanis, *begums* and the visiting female scholars. The most substantive article appeared in *The Asian Age* in September. It closes with a blessing on the 'helping hands' of the scholars in the conference: 'May their tribe increase.' It also contains a statement by the leading Sidi elder in the conference, the late Sidi Kamar Badshah, the Sidi community's *nangasi*, or leader of ritual music.²⁰ He is quoted as saying: 'This gesture will always remain in our hearts. Many promises are made and broken by politicians and different governments but we are finally being helped by somebody who is genuinely concerned about our traditions' (Pandya 2000).²¹ Kamarbhai died of multiple ailments three months later at age 72, after having given his utmost for the success of the conference, despite his physical problems. We would like to believe that he died with renewed hope for the future of his community, and with appreciation for the public platform from which he expressed his aspirations and artistry to such a large and diverse audience, with his charismatic leadership and depth of expression. We have dedicated this volume to him in recognition of his charismatic energy and relentless efforts on behalf of his community.

After other proposals to develop a Sidi educational project were finally rejected, evidently through concern over conflicts with the *madrassa* at the shrine, the collaborative 'Sidi CD Project' was chosen and established in the days following the conference by a few remaining scholars and Sidi leaders.²² The results of this project are presented in Amy Catlin's article at the end of this volume.

History of Sidi Studies²³

The historical sources for the study of the African presence in South Asia are many and diverse, as the papers in this collection of essays demonstrate. Our purpose here, however, is to examine the scholarly and wider secondary literature on these communities as a way of locating the present volume in that tradition.

By and large, modern scholars from Harris (1971) on have noted

the paucity of studies of African Indians. One may ask why the historical and present-day experiences of diasporic populations of Africans and their descendants in India is an understudied topic by scholars. Among several possible reasons for this is the fact that the slave trade from East Africa to India did not become the kind of grand enterprise that developed from West Africa to the Americas. Prior to the European presence in India from the beginning of the 16th century Arab merchants conducted most of the slave trade. As trade across the Indian Ocean was conducted on a personal basis, careful records were seldom left by the Arabs, nor by those Indians who traded in slaves; later in history neither did the Europeans keep careful records with respect to the slave trade to India. Moreover, the fact that many Africans in Asia adopted Islam, Muslim names and indigenous languages makes it difficult for the historian to identify them in archival sources. Whatever historical sources exist on the slave trade are of disparate nature and fragments are scattered in numerous archives in India as well as abroad (Harris 1971: xiii). In spite of these difficulties, historians have made use of whatever information has been available, including logbooks, customs documents, treaties, court records and travel accounts written by Arabs and Europeans who took notice of the slave trade and of Africans in Asia. The British East India Company has also left numerous volumes containing information about slave trade and the presence of Africans in India, dating back to the 17th century. In addition, there are Portuguese documents reaching back to the 16th century preserved in Goa at the Historical Archives and Xavier Centre of Historical Research. It is also reported that by the mid-18th century there were enslaved Africans in the French territories on the Coromandel coast, in Southeast India. A few remained in Madras, but what happened to the majority of them is not known (Sadiq Ali 1996: 233–40). It is likely that information on African slaves and the slave trade conducted by the French exists in the various archives relevant to the former French colony of Pondicherry.

Nevertheless, there is a small body of research dating back into the late 19th century that clearly indicates longstanding interest in the scattered modern communities, as well as in the historical role of prominent Africans in Islamic South Asia. The earliest of these studies were associated with the assumption of British imperial rule in India. Accordingly, most were conducted by British and Indians in

the service of the British colonial administration in India. For example, in his three-volume *History of the Mahrattas*, James Grant Duff (1826), employing the original records of the Bombay Government, provides numerous examples of the presence of Sidis in western India. Similarly, there is a passage about the Sidi attack on Bombay in 1689–90 in Anderson's *The English in Western India* (1854; extracts from 2nd edition in Irwin 1975: 161–64). The first European eye witness account of a Sidi community comes from Lieutenant George Fulljames (1838/1839), however, who visited Gori Pir village and the nearby carnelian mines in 1832. More typical, however, are relevant sections pertaining to Sidis in works like the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (1880, 1883a, 1883b, 1899), Risley's *The People of India* (1915), Russell & Hiralal's *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (1916), and Enthoven's *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay* (1975 [1922]). Common for these studies, normally restricted to a few pages as part of a larger work on Indian castes and tribes, is that they were conducted to provide ethnographic knowledge of the communities for the British administration in India. The studies provide details about languages, religions, customs and history about the communities of African descent. Although the writers do not always provide sources for their information, we can assume that most data were collected through field visits in the respective communities.

Modern scholarly studies that refer to the history of Africans in India date to the first edition of *The Cambridge History of India* (1922–37). With the further development of modern historiography, more focused studies on specific polities or regions also included similar passages about Africans where appropriate (see, e.g., Irwin 1977: 145–49, citing Yazdani 1947: 180–81). Africans also are mentioned significantly in two pioneering histories of the slave trade to and slavery in India, by Banaji (1933) and Colaço (1938). In his published University of Bombay Ph.D. dissertation, *Slavery in British India*, Banaji investigates slavery as a social phenomenon in India between 1772 and 1843. Making use of a wide range of sources, he covers all the Indian provinces and relates the new practices of slavery and the status of slaves that emerged during British colonisation with the indigenous Indian practices that existed since the Vedic times. He concludes with a thorough discussion about the political and judicial

processes that finally led to the 19th century treaties for abolition of the slave trade to India and in the Indian Ocean. Africans are an important element in, though not the focus of, his study.²⁴

Colaço's study of abolition in Portuguese India deals mainly with the slave trade engaged in by the Portuguese in India, particularly in Goa. The focus is on the slaves captured in the Portuguese dominions in Africa, their transport to India and tasks they performed in India. His main sources were those available at Historical Archives of Goa.²⁵

For all the useful information in these sources and others like them, modern Sidi studies really begin with Banaji, who published *Bombay and the Sidis* in 1932. Banaji investigates the relations between the Sidis of Janjira (a small community of Africans residing on the island Janjira, located about 100 km south of Bombay) and local Hindu kings, the Mughals, and the British colonial administration between the 17th and 19th centuries. He reviews the various treaties, combats and trade relations in reconstructing the history of this dynamic African Indian community during its heyday as a coastal power in western India.

Banaji's two studies are among the most thoroughly researched and original works about the presence of Africans in India and were clearly far ahead of their time. Indeed, with few exceptions, after his publications there was a hiatus in studies in this field until renewed interest in the African presence in India was stimulated by Joseph Harris's seminal book on *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (1971). The exceptions focus on the figure of Malik Ambar, the *wazir* of Ahmednagar who dominated that major Deccani state in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. In 1957 Seth published an important short profile of Malik Ambar; a decade later Tamaskar (1968–69) wrote a useful reassessment of the man which he enlarged into a book in 1978, while Shyam devoted an entire monograph to his life and times (1968).²⁶ Moreover, since there exist several portraits of Malik Ambar, art historians have also contributed to this bibliography (Khandalaval and Chandra 1955/1956; Zembrowski 1983). During the same period, Pankhurst (1960, 1961) wrote two useful articles about Ethiopians in India that he has recently expanded into a much larger chapter (Pankhurst 2002). Similarly, Freeman-Grenville's useful essay on Swahili remnants among the Sidis of Sind, which

is based upon the 19th century observations of Burton (1992 [1851]: 253–57, 372–74), appeared in 1971.

What distinguished Harris' book was that it was the first major work to highlight various historical connections across the northwestern Indian Ocean with a specific focus on the slave trade between East Africa and India. Trained in African history at Northwestern University, Harris consulted many archives in India and abroad that had unusual material related to the presence of Africans in India and in other parts of Asia. Harris also had access to archival material that was not accessible during Banaji's time. In addition, he commissioned translations of several important documents from Persian and Urdu into English. Harris' work opened up a field for further investigation which has resulted in several historians who have followed his path and a number of ensuing publications referring to the African presence in Indian history. Among these the most significant are, in chronological order, by Pescatello (1977), Khalidi (1988), Chauhan (1995), Sadiq Ali (1996), and Baptiste (1998a & 1998b) (see also Patel 1991 and Gupta 1991). At least as important is the fact that Harris linked the story of the Sidis to the wider world of the global African diaspora, thereby rescuing Sidi history from its obscure corner in the history of the South Asian subcontinent.

If knowledge about Africans in Indian history is limited, then until very recently information about present-day African descendants has been equally fragmentary, although it is true that Sorley (1931) published an important study of the Siddis of Karnataka as part of the colonial *Census of India*. At about the same time as the appearance of Harris' book, two short articles appeared in Africanist journals about the contemporary plight of Sidi communities (see Bhattacharya 1970; Rao 1973). Other short notices appeared in the following decades (e.g. Babalola 1984; Lodhi 1992). The first serious sociological surveys of the Sidis of Gujarat appeared in the 1961 *Census of India* (Trivedi 1967a & 1967b); a decade later Palakshappa (1973, later published in 1976) completed a similar study of the Siddis of Karnataka. After another decade Lobo (1984) produced a further study of Siddis in Karnataka. In the early 1990s Naik and Pandya (1993) published their study of the Sidis of Gujarat, with its emphasis on development issues, while Hiremath (1993) completed his Ph.D. dissertation at Karnatak University, Dharwad, on language among the Siddis of Uttara Kannada. Most recently, Micklem (2001) published a general

study on the Sidis of Gujarat based on both primary and secondary sources for his M.A. thesis at the University of Edinburgh.

There is a parallel tradition of anthropometric and biomedical studies of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada, a tradition that dates as far back as Roy Choudhury (1957) and Bhattacharya (1969). In 1985, Pavate completed a Ph.D. dissertation at Karnatak University on an aspect of the biological anthropology of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first graduate degree thesis about an African Indian community in India since Banaji's pioneering history. Published studies by Vijayakumar (1987) and Bhandry (1995) similarly emphasise the medical aspects of anthropological research among this population of Siddis. These have since been followed by Patil's (1998) biomedical study of the same population.²⁷

This brief overview brings us more or less to the present, and to the contributors to this collection of essays. We have already seen in the first section of this introduction how the current volume took shape. It will also be abundantly clear to all who read the essays that follow how deeply indebted all of us are to the trailblazing work of Helene Basu, whose research and writing about the Sidis of Gujarat date back to the late 1980s (see, e.g., Basu 1993, 1995, 1998, 2000). Historiographically, the big question is why are we witnessing such an explosion of interest (relatively speaking) in African Indians? We think the answer is to be found on two fronts: first, the increasing communalisation in India has put the Sidis themselves on alert, making at least a few of them more self-conscious of their identity as African Indians and others of the inherent tension between being both African and Indian; second, the surge of interest in the African diaspora as a global phenomenon, something that traces its genesis once again to the initiative of Joseph Harris (1983; 1992) has attracted a new group of Africanists, as well as South Asianists, to this topic (e.g., Alpers 1997). Whatever the reasons, let us now turn to an overview of the chapters in this book.

Overview

In the first contribution, Edward A. Alpers provides a survey of the African presence in India by placing those experiences in the wider context of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean world. Although Africans may constitute a small component of the population of

South Asia, the movement of African peoples—both forced and voluntary—throughout the Indian Ocean region was a widespread phenomenon for many centuries. His chapter is followed by a joint paper by two archaeologists, J. Mark Kenoyer and Kuldeep K. Bhan, who have worked together for many years at the major Indus Valley site of Harappa. They propose that the history of Sidis in north-west India and Pakistan, and especially that of the important Sufi leader Gori Pir, should be located in the historical context of the development and expansion of the ancient agate bead industry. These first two chapters set the stage historically for two major contemporary themes of the entire collection: globalisation and transnationality.

The next two papers address issues at the shrine of Gori Pir on a hill in Gujarat. The first, by Helene Basu, discusses the ways in which Sidis have struggled to maintain control of this sacred site over the past two decades and how their loss of control over its administration has affected them as a community. Based on her own extensive research and commitment to this community for more than a decade, Basu's chapter reveals the ways in which local and national politics have intertwined to effect change at Gori Pir. Prita Meier's chapter is based on a short visit to the shrine, but she succeeds in placing the performance she observed there in its widest, transnational setting as it bears upon Sidi identity.

The following three papers shift the geographical focus of the volume to the very different Siddi communities of Uttara Kannada, but their focus remains on performance and the meanings that can be attached to performance and the construction of identity. Charles Camara, who has studied these Siddi groups for several years, reconstructs the history of these scattered communities and analyses the ways in which their identity has evolved over time and has been affected by their different religious affiliations. Pashington Obeng, whose previous work has focused on Christian practice in Ghana, takes us through a detailed analysis of the official Church observance of St. Rita's Day celebrations by Roman Catholic Siddis and argues that their centrality to these celebrations provides a space for them to assert their African heritage. Henry Drewal, by contrast, whose earlier scholarship has been on African religion and art in Nigeria and Brazil, contends that the intervention of official cultural representatives of the state is co-opting the Siddis

with whom he worked and rendering their dance and musical performances more Indian and less African.

The next two chapters complicate issues of identity and performance even further. Filmmaker Beheroze Shroff, a Parsi devotee of Gori Pir since childhood, introduces us to the sacred community of which she and her family are a part and explores how her filming of these Sidis has caused her to confront mutual issues of identity. Are Sidis African or Indian, or both? How does being an adept of Gori Pir affect her identity as a Parsi and an Indian? Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy's contribution returns us to the joined themes of performance, identity, and transnationalism, as she describes the process of producing a professional recording of Sidi devotional music and helping the Sidi musicians with whom she worked to organise an international tour to showcase their music and ecstatic performances. Finally, we conclude the volume with a short note by senior historian Jayanti Patel, who reminds us that above all else, the Sidis of Gujarat (and by extension of Karnataka) deserve better opportunities and security in which to pursue their individual and community development and well-being. Like most of the contributions to this collection of essays, his essay embodies a kind of committed, involved scholarship and serious reflexivity on the part of the individual scholar that give rise to the title of the volume, *Sidis and Scholars*.

Notes

1. The most widespread name for African Indians is usually spelled 'Sidi' in Gujarat but pronounced more as 'Siddi' (elsewhere spelled Siddi especially in Karnataka, and Shidi in Pakistan). The name is assumed by some linguists to be derived from Saiyed, an Islamic honorific meaning a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad. Platts gives the derivation of the word as a vulgarisation of *saiyidi*, 'An appellation of Africans; a negro' (Platts 1911: 710), and Sharif (et al) states 'The Sidi or Sayyidi, "Master", is an African negro' (Sharif 1921[1832]/1975: 173). In this volume we use Sidi for Gujaratis and Siddi for Karnatakans.
2. Ervin's chapter entitled 'Participatory Action Research' 'explores a recent trend among some researchers to turn more of the actual process and ownership of research over to citizens' groups and local communities. They believe policy should be democratically shaped, based on local knowledge' (Ervin 2000: 199-210). Participatory Action Research studies in India include Tandon (1988) and Tandon and Fernandes (1984).
3. Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy is *emeritus* professor of ethnomusicology at UCLA.

4. 'Rajpipla was a first class State in the Rewa Kantha Agency of Bombay Presidency with an area of around 1,600 square miles. Its territory covered the valley of the Narmada River and Satpura mountain range' (Singhji and Vikram 2001).
5. We have chosen to use pseudonyms for this village and its inhabitants in this volume, with the exception of the public speakers quoted in this introduction including the deceased leader, Kamar Badshah, to whom the book is dedicated and who will be named throughout.
6. The Sri Laxminath Trust has published a volume *Bhil Basera (Abode of the Bhils)* in English and Gujarati concerning the Bhils in the region and the history of the region. It also describes current activities, such as the Tribal, Heritage, and Royal museums of the Rajvant Palace Resort (Singh and Singh 2001).
7. Women in the local Sidi community told us that they recalled being summoned to sing *qawwalis* for the women of the royal family in the *zenana* during the previous maharaja's reign.
8. Yuvraj Manvendra Singh works closely with the local Bhil tribals, both in his vermiculture farm and in his daily yoga classes for the Bhils.
9. Prita Meier was a participant in the University of Iowa Ford Foundation Crossing Borders Project that included Gujarati Sidis.
10. A festive tent or canopy.
11. Gori Pir's judgments are sought through the ordeal of walking up the steps to the shrine with shackles on the ankles, while drums beat furiously. If the shackles (*bedi*) open, the individual is deemed innocent. See article by Kenoyer and Bhan in this volume.
12. As hereditary *fakirs*, Sidis follow the path of poverty.
13. Here, being treated 'better' in Saurashtra means being classified as a Scheduled Tribe, which entails government assistance for education and employment. 'Being treated like tribals' in the previous sentence means not being given respect, for tribals are considered to be the lowest rank in society.
14. A famous cricket star of Trinidad.
15. It is generally said that the sports initiative which brought Sidi youth to Bangalore for training failed for social reasons, as the Sidis became very homesick.
16. One of them, Faridaben Almubrik Sidi, has since established the Sidi-Goma Almubrik Charitable Trust Fund in Bhavnagar, Saurashtra, inspired by the conference. The Trust has already conducted two functions to recognize the achievements of Sidi students of all ages, and has produced a media publication entitled *Challo Ursma (Let's Go to the Urs)*.
17. Tomb of a saint.
18. Costumed performances do not take place within the shrine premises.

19. Raghubirsinghji was quoted as expressing hope that the conference might lead to improvement in the educational and awareness level of Sidis. Sidi Rumani (sic) Bibi was in disagreement and doubted the motivations of the conference. Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Fakirbhai Vaghela was quoted as saying that the Scheduled Tribe classification is a Central government decision and there was little that could be done to rectify the divergent classification of Sidis (Ghatwai 2000).
20. The *nangasi* (also called *nagarci*) is one of the most important of the five *gadivaras*, or ritual office-bearers of the Sidi who perform important functions during the annual *urs* to Gori Pir. The other members of this assembly are *nishandar*, bearer of the insignia; *kotwal*, officer who carries ritual *cadar* to the *urs*, *makandar*, keeper of the shrine, and *daftari*, office keeper (Sidi Salam interview by Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, 26 December 2001).
21. This was unfortunately individualised praise, no doubt of a hopeful nature. Responsibility and credit belong to all the participants who joined to discuss the Sidis' needs at this conference, and especially to Basu's pathbreaking research and Shroff's film investigations that made the recent interactions possible.
22. Helene Basu, Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy-Jairazbhoy, Nazir Jairazbhoy, Kamar Sidi Badshah, Hyder Badshah Sidi, and Shakil Kamar Sidi laid the foundations for the project to survey the music of Sidis throughout Gujarat and record examples for inclusion in the first Sidi CD (Catlin 2002).
23. The editors wish to acknowledge the important contribution of Charles Camara to this section of the Introduction.
24. Banaji's pioneering study has been superseded by the remarkable book by Chatterjee (1999).
25. Cf. the important revisionist essay by Walker (2001).
26. We can also anticipate a major reconsideration of Malik Ambar by Richard Eaton as one of the biographical profiles for his forthcoming volume on the social history of Islamic India for *The New Cambridge History of India*.
27. See also the dissertation by Hadi (2001) and on-going unpublished research which reveals that mitochondrial DNA analysis shows 10 % African (Sub-Saharan) haplotype (a haplotype is a special combination of markers on a portion of mitochondrial DNA) in the Makrani population around Karachi. Syed Sibte Hadi email to Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, 24 August 2002.

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Africans in India and the Wider Context of the Indian Ocean

Edward A. Alpers

The experience of Africans in India dates back many centuries. Certainly, we know from the history of navigation and commerce in the Indian Ocean that all parts of the Western Indian Ocean were connected at least as long ago as the *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* (1st century). For earlier periods, archaeological evidence (Ratnagar 1981) of significant seaborne trade from the Harappa Civilisation of the Indus Valley to the Gulf and Mesopotamia (2600–1760 BC) suggests the possibility of even greater antiquity for indirect overseas contacts with Northeast Africa through the Gulf, which was certainly the case during the time of Darius the Great (521–485 BC), ruler of the Achaemenid Empire of the Persians (Hourani 1995: 11). Notwithstanding the work of those Afrocentric scholars who regard this African connection as ancient and foundational for Asia (Rashidi 1995), for the most part the meaningful presence of Africans in India probably dates from the rise of Islam, which gave new life to commercial and cultural linkages across the Northwest Indian Ocean, in particular. It is without question that Africans, whether from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts, the Benadir coast of southern Somalia, or the Swahili coast, were aboard many, if not most, of the sailing vessels that plied this trade. That said, the evidence for the presence of Africans in India during the first centuries of Islam is scarce. Nor should we be surprised by this absence. First, while there was almost certainly a diaspora of African sailors (whether free or enslaved) around the Indian Ocean, given the work of sailors their numbers would probably have been small and their presence transitory, although no doubt

some settled in the ports of the littoral and married or cohabited with local women (for earlier times, see Wink 1991: 28; for the 19th century, see Ewald 2000). Second, India had plenty of surplus labour to exploit and, in general, was not a major demand site for the importation of non-Indian slave labour (but cf. Wink 1991: 14, 29, 31). Thus, unlike the Abbasid dynasty in modern Iraq, which imported large numbers of Zanj slaves from eastern Africa to work in the massive land reclamation projects undertaken in the saline southern marshes around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the late 7th to 9th centuries (Popovic 1999), there was never any parallel requirement for significant numbers of agricultural labourers from Africa in India, although, as we shall see below, significant numbers of military slaves entered the subcontinent after the expansion of Islam to northern India at the end of the 10th century.

It is to this later era that the Sidis of Gujarat trace the roots of their saint and community progenitor, Gori Pir, who is usually described as an Abyssinian who came to Gujarat to trade in the 14th century and whose arrival is associated with the extension of trade in locally mined agate to Africa. This dating accords well with evidence that by the end of the 12th century there were resident traders and slaves being traded from both Abyssinia and Zanzibar at Tiz, an important port of the Makran in what is today Iran (Badalkhan 2002), and that in 1451 Sultan Mahmud Khilji (1436–1469), founder of the Khilji dynasty of Malwa, is reported to have visited Gori Pir's *dargah* (Lokhandwala 1970: 4).¹ One story recounted to Helene Basu (1995: 71–74) also calls Gori Pir 'an Abyssinian lord named Sidi Mubarak Nobi, who went on pilgrimage to the holy city of Mekka,' before being dispatched to Hindustan 'to light the lamp of Islam,' thereby associating him with the arrival of Islam in the same era. This name suggests something quite different, however, as Mubarak is a characteristic Islamic slave name and the suffix Nobi indicates that he was from the Sudan, rather than the Ethiopian highlands or Christian Abyssinia (see Alpers 1997). Still, whatever the inherent problems in this kind of text, local traditions have the virtue of providing a coherent explanation for the wide distribution of Gori Pir shrines across from Sind through Saurashtra to southern Gujarat in association with the agate trade (see Kenoyer and Bhan in this volume). It is incumbent upon historians to sort out this history more precisely than has been possible to date.

The history of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada is even less well known than is those of Gujarat.² While there is general agreement that the Siddi villages deep in the forests of the Western Ghats were an attractive refuge for enslaved or simply unhappy free Africans at Goa, reconstructing the history of these communities has only just begun (see Camara in this volume). Despite this negligence, we do know that in the wake of the major uprising against the British throughout India in 1857, one Siddi Bastian (from the Portuguese name Sebastião) led a group of rebels including both Siddis and Kanarese around Supa in Uttara Kannada, where they wreaked havoc through a campaign of looting and burning along the border with Goa that lasted into 1859 (Shirodkar 1998).

In seeking to appreciate the histories of these African Indian communities, it is instructive to locate the history of Gori Pir and the Sidi communities in Gujarat and Karnataka in the wider context of Africans in the Indian Ocean world. For the Sidis of Gujarat, it means looking towards the Persian Gulf and Arabia, that is, within the larger Islamic world, where most Africans who had settled in these regions were enslaved (Alpers 1997). For the Siddis of Uttara Kannada, it means saying something about the Portuguese colonial empire in India and East Africa. Let us begin with the first of these regional settings.

In the Islamic lands of the northwest Indian Ocean, Africans could be found as sailors, in military retinues, and as domestic servants and urban workers in the most important port cities and at Mecca. Most were enslaved, but others were free. Among the former, some of them were eunuchs who rose to high position in Arabian society, as for example the keepers of the Kaaba in Mecca (Marmon 1995; more broadly, see Ayalon 1979; for their central role in the Ottoman court, see Toledano 1998: 41–53). African military slaves in the Hadramaut, in modern Yemen, for example, were still an important component of the local political scene as late as the 1930s. From the late 18th century right through the following century, however, as this part of the world was steadily drawn into the developing world economy that was driven by the industrial revolution in Europe and America, the demand for slaves increased significantly in ways that were quite different from previous experience, including that of India. First, urban development in the principal port cities of the Arabian peninsula created a new demand for labour that was satisfied by the importa-

tion of African slaves from both Northeast and Eastern Africa. Second, the expansion of date plantations in the Persian Gulf further intensified the demand for enslaved labour from Africa. Third, the growth of the pearl industry in both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf created parallel labour demands that were largely met from the same sources. As a consequence, there are significant modern African descended populations throughout the region, with smaller communities associated with the growth in trade located in southern Iran (see Mirzai 2000), Pakistan (see Baillie 1975: 35–36; Badalkhan 2002), and Gujarat, where the connection with Gori Pir reasserts itself.

This radical shift in the economic and social history of the region was intimately linked to the extension of British hegemony in the Indian Ocean following Great Britain's defeat of Napoleonic France in the early 19th century. Thus the rise of Oman under the Busaidi dynasty that by 1840 had made Zanzibar its center of operations would have been unthinkable without the commercial skills and access to capital of the very large community of Indian merchants first at Muscat and then at Zanzibar (Bhacker 1992; Sheriff 1987). Similarly, the British occupation of Aden in 1839 transformed a settlement that was long past its prime into a major crossroads of the Western Indian Ocean (Gavin 1975). Finally, the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869 completed the network that linked all of these parts to British India and to the evolving domination of British capital throughout the Western Indian Ocean.

Returning to our starting point in Gujarat, even if we accept the oral traditions about Gori Pir as being essentially historical, we do not yet understand completely where in Africa these communities that we know today as Sidis originated or may have been renewed by African immigrants over the centuries. An 1832 visitor to the agate mines of southern Gujarat, for instance, describes 'a peer's tomb' located atop a high hill as follows: 'The only people residing there are a few Siddis or negroes who say that they were born and bred on the spot, whither their fathers came from Broach' (Fulljames 1838/1839: 76). There is, however, both internal and external evidence that Sidis regularly entertained local dignitaries in Gujarat by performing dances called '*goma*' (derived from Swahili *ngoma*, generic for drum or dance), which suggests an East rather Northeast African origin for the modern Sidi population of Gujarat.³ For example, there are indica-

tions such as East African exogamous clan names recorded in Gujarat by Naik and Pandya (1993; see Alpers 2000: 92 for their identification) that many Sidis are descended from these East African populations. Many would most probably have been primarily employed in the wealthy households of local merchants and rulers. To take only one example, we have information that in the 1940s there still was a village of Africans near Dwarka who were the descendants of slaves imported from Zanzibar specifically to entertain the Nawab of Junagadh in Saurashtra (Couceiro 1969: 138).⁴ Here we need to know much more than we do about the history of African slavery in the major Indian port cities of the Arabian Sea, such as Cambay and Bharuch, as well as of the regional princely states. What we do know is that the Muslim slave trade persisted right through the 19th century in the Western Indian Ocean, although with the extension of British rule in India slavery was outlawed in 1840, to be followed shortly, if very incompletely, by the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1842 that mandated the end to slave trading in Portuguese India (Chatterjee 1999; Walker 2001).

If it is not, then, entirely clear how the community of African miners and traders evolved over time at Gori Pir village and the other locations in Gujarat and the lower Sind valley, we do know that Africans in India played a significant role during the era of Muslim domination as military slaves. Military slaves, not all of whom were African, of course, are a well known feature of Islamic history. In the case of South Asia, enslaved Ethiopians played a prominent role as soldiers, concubines, and eunuchs in Muslim India. As early as the second quarter of the 13th century, Habshis (derived from the Arabic name for the peoples of Ethiopia, as they are referred to in the contemporary sources) had become one of several factors in the military and political arena of the new Turkish Ilyas Shahi Sultanate of Delhi. In particular, a Habshi slave named Jamal al-Din Yaqut gained notoriety for the favour shown to him by Sultana Raziya (reigned 1236–1240), daughter of the founder of the Turkish Sultanate of Delhi (Pande 1990: 60–64). During his peregrinations in India (1333–1342), the great Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta observed many Habshi slaves employed as sailors and soldiers by rulers from north India to Sri Lanka. At Alapur, the Governor was a Habshi named Badr, and he encountered several other important Habshi officials in his travels

down the subcontinent. Later in that century, one Malik Sarwar (aka Kwaja Jahan), who may have been a Habshi eunuch, achieved virtual independence from the Delhi Sultanate by establishing a dynasty known as the Sharqis of Jawnpur (1394–1479) in what is now Uttar Pradesh state. Habshis also reached the kingdom of Bengal directly by sea and became important as military slaves under Rukn-al-Din Barbak Shah (reigned 1459–1474). In 1486, unhappy with his son and successor they usurped power. They ruled Bengal for seven years before themselves being overthrown as a consequence of the reign of terror imposed by the last Habshi ruler, Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah (1491–1494). In the aftermath of the Habshi interregnum and the rise of the Husain Shahi dynasty, the Habshi were expelled from Bengal *en masse* (Roy 1986: 236, 247–258). Over time they drifted to the Deccan, where the rulers of the Bahmani Kingdom had been employing Habshi military forces since earlier in the century and where eventually several Habshis also emerged as major military and political leaders.

As Sunni Muslims, Habshis were natural allies of Deccani Muslims against Shia Muslim mercenaries who were infiltrating the kingdom from the north. In the late 15th century, Habshi ruled as governors of two of the kingdom's four provinces; another served as minister of revenue under Sultan Mahmud (reigned 1482–1518). At Bidar, the Bahmani capital, there still stands the Habshi *Kot*, or fortress, where tombs of prominent Ethiopians are located. Habshis continued to be centrally involved in court intrigues well into the next century, following the collapse of the Deccani kingdom and its replacement by several new, independent kingdoms. They were especially important in the 16th century kingdoms of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda. The most famous of these influential Habshi figures in the political history of the Deccan was Malik Ambar, who was *wazir* and virtual ruler of Ahmadnagar from 1600 to 1626. Malik Ambar rose to prominence by defeating an invading Mughal army in 1601 and securing the throne for the heir to the Nizam Shahi dynasty. He rearranged the kingdom's revenue system, organised the army to defend against the Mughals, founded a new capital city at Khirki (later Aurangabad) in 1610, and ordered the construction of a sophisticated water supply system to the town. Following Malik Ambar's death, another Habshi, Hamad Khan, replaced him as major-domo for the

kingdom, while he in turn was followed by Malik Ambar's grandson. During this same period, the Habshi Ikhlas Khan (1627–1656) served as *wazir* of Bijapur (Ali 1996).

Related to the renown enjoyed by Habshi military and court officials in the Deccan at this time was the emergence of a Habshi force as the dominant naval power along the coast of western India. Following the conquest of the coastal region of the southern Konkan coast from Gujarat early in the 16th century, the ruler of Ahmadnagar gave command of the island fort at Janjira to the Habshi noble Sidi Yaqut because of his military exploits and leadership during its capture. For the next two centuries the Sidis, as they became known, were unchallenged masters of the coasts, whether serving Ahmadnagar, the Mughals, or their own interests. Although effective control of the coast passed to the British in 1819, and their powers were whittled away over the following decades, they maintained their nominal independence until 1870, when they formally submitted to British overrule (Chauhan 1995: 212–13, 223; Sadiq Ali 1996: 183–85).

Habshis were also prominent during the centuries of Muslim domination of northern India in Gujarat, where they were found as soldiers in the armies of its rulers and as sailors in its ports as early as the 13th century. During the reign of Sultan Bahadur (1526–1537) there were a reported 5,000 Habshis in Ahmadabad alone, most of whom were probably prisoners taken in the Muslim invasion of Ethiopia in 1527 (Ross 1910: xxxiii–xxxiv; Khalidi 1988: 7).⁵ Prominent Habshis rose to occupy positions of leadership under successive rulers of Gujarat during the middle decades of the century until Akbar's conquest of Ahmedabad in July 1572, and even afterwards several remained in positions of authority. Meanwhile, active commercial links between this region and the Horn of Africa also reflected the vitality of Islam. They also remind us that not all Habshis, in particular those Muslim traders who are known as Jabarti in Ethiopia, were forced migrants.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, African eunuchs were also present at the courts of Muslim Indian rulers, as is possibly suggested by a drawing from Golconda,⁶ which had a large African population in the 17th century. Finally, the Asafiya dynasty of Hyderabad, which was established in 1724, maintained a royal guard of African slave soldiers who also entertained their masters with African song and

dance (Khalidi 1988: 11–14; Sadiq Ali 1996: 193–201). Indeed, descendants of the Nizam's bodyguard still live in that city. They call themselves *Chaush*, a term deriving from Ottoman military and administrative nomenclature and signifying an officer (Roberts 2000).

A second source of demand for African slaves in India came from the Europeans who established themselves at various coastal entrepôts from Kacch to Calcutta. Like their Muslim rivals in the Indian Ocean, the Europeans generally used African slave labour in India as sailors on their ships, soldiers in their armies, and servants in their households. The Portuguese, in particular, exploited their outposts in East Africa to introduce slaves to India. Slaves from Mozambique were specifically included in ship's crews for India, while the literature is full of accounts of Portuguese officials taking the air at Goa on litters borne by slaves and surrounded by large retinues of lavishly clothed bondsmen. More than anything else, this was a form of conspicuous consumption. As the center of Portuguese India, Goa had a significant population of African slaves, but their descendants are nowhere to be found there today.⁷ Although the Sidis of Uttara Kannada do not choose to remember an historical connection to Goa (and thereby to slavery), it appears likely that in the mid-19th century when slavery was abolished in the Portuguese empire most freedmen simply abandoned Goa for the Western Ghats where today their descendants may be found in small Sidi villages (Shastri 1987; Camara in this volume). In seeking out the safety of this remote and sparsely populated mountainous region, these Sidis recapitulated the pattern of removal of countless African maroon communities in the Americas and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean world (Alpers 2003). It was Diu, in Gujarat, however, that had the strongest commercial ties to Mozambique through its communities of Hindu and Muslim traders.⁸ As late as 1838 this intimate connection expressed itself in an African population that comprised 6 per cent of the town's total inhabitants (Carreira 1998: 686). In the 20th century, an African presence continued at Diu in the form of colonial troops recruited in Mozambique until the expulsion of the Portuguese.

Like the Portuguese, both the French and the British also employed African slaves in their Indian establishments as servants and soldiers. In Sri Lanka, a 17th century Sinhalese poem includes 'Abyssinians' and 'Cafres' among the soldiers of an invading Portu-

guese army (Peiris 1953: 16); when the British seized the island early in the 19th century Africans were again among the occupying army. In both Portuguese India and British Sri Lanka African soldiers were often to be found in regimental bands. Finally, when the British abolished the slave trade and began to police the world's oceans in the 19th century, they made Bombay one of the principal ports where they resettled liberated African captives. The liberated African community that evolved at Bombay was small, but like the more famous parallel community at Freetown in Sierra Leone, they became pawns in the extension of British influence in Africa. In East Africa, a small Christian community was founded on the Swahili coast at Freretown, outside of Mombasa, in what is today Kenya, where they were known as Bombay Africans (Temu 1971; Harris 1987).⁹ Elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, so-called 'liberated Africans' were made to disembark at the Seychelles Islands so that they could be recruited to provide labor for the coconut plantations that dominated that colony's economy (Nwulia 1981: 196–99).

A final context in which to place the experience of Sidis moves us from the Northwest to the Southwest Indian Ocean. Here again, there are direct connections to India in the important presence of Indian traders at Zanzibar, Mozambique, and western Madagascar from before the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century right into the present. This intimate connection was significantly reinforced following the abolition of slavery in 1835 and the end of the apprenticeship system for former slaves four years later at Mauritius by the massive migration of indentured Indian labourers who were brought from all over the subcontinent to provide labour on the rapidly expanding sugar plantations of Mauritius and Natal, and to a lesser extent of La Réunion after abolition by the French in 1848.¹⁰ Africans were first carried to the Mascarene Islands from West Africa by the French when they permanently occupied the islands in the late 17th century, but it was not until the expansion of plantation economies on Bourbon (La Réunion) and Île de France (Mauritius) from the late 18th century that significant numbers of slaves from East Africa and Madagascar were introduced to the islands. Here the use of African slave labour was exactly like the Caribbean case and, in fact, one can legitimately think of the Mascarenes as Caribbean islands in the wrong ocean in so far as their economic and social histories are concerned.

Madagascar, however, presents a different sort of comparison that suggests closer resemblance to the place of Sidis in India than does that of the Mascarenes.

As we have just seen, Madagascar was a source of slave labour for the French plantation islands to its east, but it also supplied slave labour to the Dutch colony at the Cape and even to the United States in limited numbers in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, the rise of the Imerina kingdom in the late 18th century and its imperial expansion in the 19th century transformed the island into an importer of African slave labour from Mozambique to work in semi-autonomous agricultural slave villages in western Madagascar. These Africans, known even today either as Mozambiky or Makoa (from the port of Mozambique and the dominant Makua people of northern Mozambique who provided most of the enslaved population), lived in close proximity to their Sakalava and Merina overlords and were integrated into the rigidly hierarchical social order of Madagascar, with its dominant Southeast Asian/Austronesian heritage, not to mention the limited influence of either Muslim or Christian ideologies.

If the experience of Sidis in Gujarat and Sind can be usefully compared to that of African communities in the larger Islamic world of the Northwest Indian Ocean, then it seems to me that the experience of Sidis in Uttara Kannada may more closely bear comparison to that of the enslaved Africans in Madagascar. More broadly conceived, what I hope I have made clear in this short essay is that the Sidis of India, both historically and in the present, share a history with other African diasporic communities of the Western Indian Ocean that is an important aspect of their own heritage. That a sense of brotherhood and common origins was perceived by at least one African Indian may be seen in the fascinating travels of Sidi Abdulla bin Mubarak from Bombay to East Africa in 1972. Throughout his account Sidi Abdulla calls anyone of African ancestry 'Sidi', while during his sea voyage to East Africa he specifically identified the port workers in both Karachi and the Seychelles, where they stopped en route to Mombasa, as 'Sidis' (Mubarak [1973]).

Finally, although I have said nothing about the ethnic origins of African communities in the Indian Ocean diaspora, let me conclude by stating that there is fascinating evidence from which we can begin to sort out this most complex of issues. This evidence ranges from

African ethnonyms to language survivals (especially Swahili), to forms of music and dance (such as we can identify at the *dargah* at Gori Pir Hill and the actual instrumentation such as the footed, standing drum known as *mugarman* and musical bow that one sees at its nearby village [see Catlin-Jairazbhoy in this volume]), to religious practice (such as *zar* possession at Bandar Abbas, Kuwait, and in 19th-century Mecca, as well as in *gwaat* possession in the Makran). But the problem of ethnogenesis in the African diaspora, which is currently a topic of great scholarly activity in the Atlantic world, is fraught with methodological pitfalls, as I have myself noted in examining this phenomenon for so-called 'Mozambiques' in Mauritius (Alpers 2001). Nevertheless, it is indeed possible to make some preliminary attempts at such historical reconstructions for Sidis, as well (see Basu 1995; Alpers 1997). What now must be undertaken in a much more systematic way than has previously been attempted is careful detailed research into the histories of these different communities.

Notes

1. Lokhanwala's translation and the identity of Mahmud Khilji as the person who visited Gori Pir's *dargah* was confirmed by a translation from the Arabic text in Ross (1910: 4) by my colleague, Professor Gabriel Piterberg. (Cf. Basu 1995: 44.)
2. Sonia Bouketo, a graduate student at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, is exploring the possibility of a dissertation project on this very topic.
3. The reconstructed root *goma, meaning 'drum,' from which the Swahili *ngoma* derives, has a much deeper history and wider distribution within proto-Bantu (email to author from Christopher Ehret, 14 June 2002); see also Janzen (1992: 57–84).
4. The precise relationship between Dwarka and Junagadh is not clear, but there was apparently a history of military and political connection between the two that dates to the later 18th century (Desai 1977: 27; for Junagadh, see Desai 1972).
5. Here we have an interesting parallel to the concentration of Muslim slaves in Brazil during the 1835 revolt of the Malés as a consequence of the Fulani *jihad* (1804–1809) and Yoruba civil wars of the period 1817–1820 in what is today Nigeria (Reis 1993: 93–96).
6. The identification of this figure as a eunuch is, however, problematic. Zebrowski (1983: 185) bases his identification on the following reasoning: 'The portrait of a dark nobleman... His complexion signifies that he was a

member of Golconda's large African community and probably a eunuch, since, although he is no longer young, he has neither the beard nor the moustache which all Muslims wore.'

7. I have, however, seen a copy of an early 20th-century photograph of a Goan family with its African 'servant' that was shared with me by Naresh Fernandes.
8. Current research by Pedro Machado, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on commercial relations between Diu and Mozambique promises to shed new light on this important topic.
9. In the case of West Africa, Christian missionary educated Africans who returned to their ancestral homelands in modern Nigeria from Sierra Leone formed an integral part of the new, Western-educated elite (Kopytoff 1965; Dixon-Fyle 1999).
10. Unlike enslaved Africans, indentured labourers had the legal protection of a contract and could, in theory, return to India after completion of their contract. (See, e.g. Deerpalsingh & Carter 1994: 298, 308, 314–15, 317–18.)

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Sidis and the Agate Bead Industry of Western India

J. Mark Kenoyer and Kuldeep K. Bhan

Introduction

The role of Gori Pir and the Sidi community in the history of Gujarat and western India is a long neglected topic. In this paper, historical records about the Sidis and their own oral traditions will be critically examined to gain new perspectives on their complex history, beginning with their origins in Africa and with a special focus on their role in the agate bead industry. On the basis of current evidence it is clear that the Sidi communities of Gujarat and adjacent regions have made significant contributions to the larger sphere of South Asian culture. These contributions include agate mining and bead manufacture, as well as local trade and long distance trade networks that connected the Indian subcontinent to the furthest reaches of the Islamic world in Africa, Southeast Asia and West Asia.

Who are the Sidi and Where did They Come From?

These two questions can only be answered conclusively through careful archaeological and DNA studies, but it is possible to make some sense out of the situation based on written documents and oral traditions. Some early anthropological studies of different racial groups in South Asia have shown that there are some Negrito groups among indigenous populations of hunter-gatherers living in parts of the Western Ghats (Kadar and Irular of the Kerala Hills), and in the Raj Mahal Hills of Bihar and Bengal. However, except for the well known Negrito populations on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, there is no conclusive evidence for indigenous Negrito populations on the

mainland (Majumdar 1961: 52–53). The Sidi communities do not appear to derive from the Andaman or Nicobar populations and are thought to be derived from original African populations. It is important to note, however, that there is a wide range of variation in skin colour, hair types and physical features of people collectively referred to as ‘Saiyidi’ or ‘Sidi’ (Figure 1). This suggests that there is no simple answer about where they came from or even when they may have begun living in the region of South Asia.

Most historians have assumed that the Sidi are descendants of black slaves or mercenaries who accompanied early Muslim traders and later armies that came to pillage and eventually conquer Sindh, Gujarat and parts of South India. While this may be correct for some communities, there is some evidence (see below) to suggest that African traders and merchants may have been present along the coastal regions long before the advent of Islam. Furthermore, Africans who did accompany the ‘Arab’ armies were made up of many different ethnic groups derived from populations throughout North Africa with additional mixture involving other Near Eastern communities, especially Arabs.

Figure 1



Kamar Badshah Sidi and Sidi Salam Jaffar (holding a *malunga*) at Gori Pir dargah

According to early Arab geographers and later historians, two distinct groups of Africans can be identified, the *ahabish* (singular Habshi) who are from Abyssinia or Ethiopia, and the *zunuj* (singular *zanj*) who are from eastern or central Africa (Wink 1990: 32). Generally speaking the Zanj were described as being dark black with frizzy hair, while the true Abyssinians had 'long hair and were of yellow, reddish or brown color and had "no slavish appearance".' (Wink 1990: 32). Few, if any of the Sidis in Gujarat or Makran would fit closely with either of these descriptions and therefore we must assume that the people referred to as Sidi in these regions are the result of many hundreds of years of intermarriage between different communities of African origin, as well as with Arab groups and other local communities in Sindh, Makran and Gujarat (Majumdar 1961: 57).

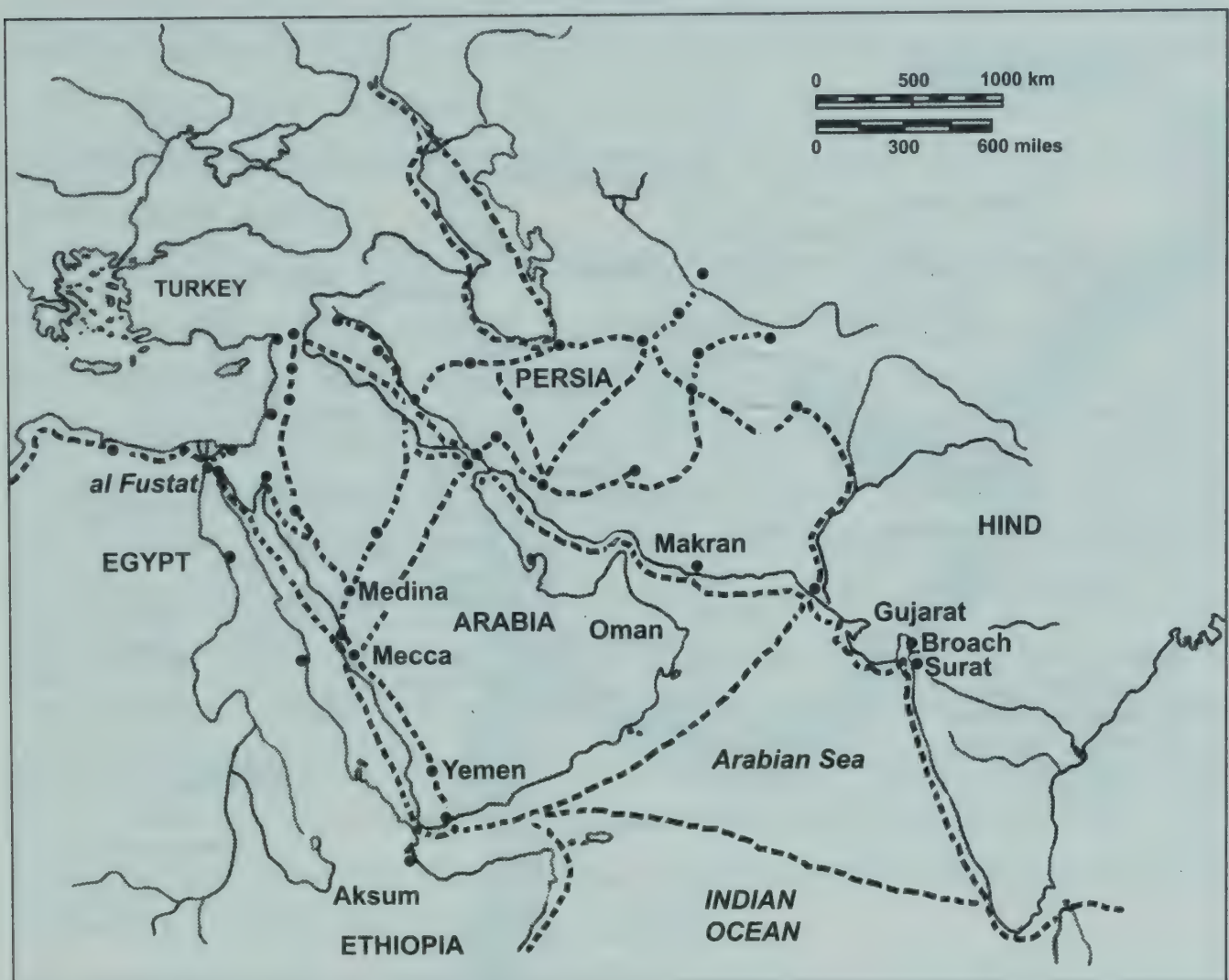
The Sidi communities in different parts of the subcontinent are therefore the result of many different historical events and should not be grouped together as a single community without careful qualification. In the following sections we will focus primarily on the Sidi communities living in Gujarat and participating in the agate industry and trade.

When did the Sidis Enter the Subcontinent?

This question is also quite difficult to answer because it appears that people of African origin have been traveling back and forth across the Arabian Sea for quite some time. Archaeological excavations at the site of Rojdi in central Gujarat have revealed the presence of domesticated grains that had their origins in Africa. These include finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) dating to around 2500–2300 BC and sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) from around 2000 BC (Weber 1991). These grains probably came to Gujarat with traders moving between Harappan and Omani settlements on either side of the Arabian Sea. The movement of these grains into the Arabian Peninsula can be dated slightly earlier, indicating a gradual spread from Africa to the subcontinent. We do not know if people from Africa were also spreading out along the Arabian trade routes, but it would not be surprising to find evidence for this as new research is undertaken.

The earliest literary evidence for the presence of Africans in the subcontinent dates to around 77 AD in the accounts of Pliny. He states that the town of Barygaza (modern Bharuch [Broach] in Gujarat)

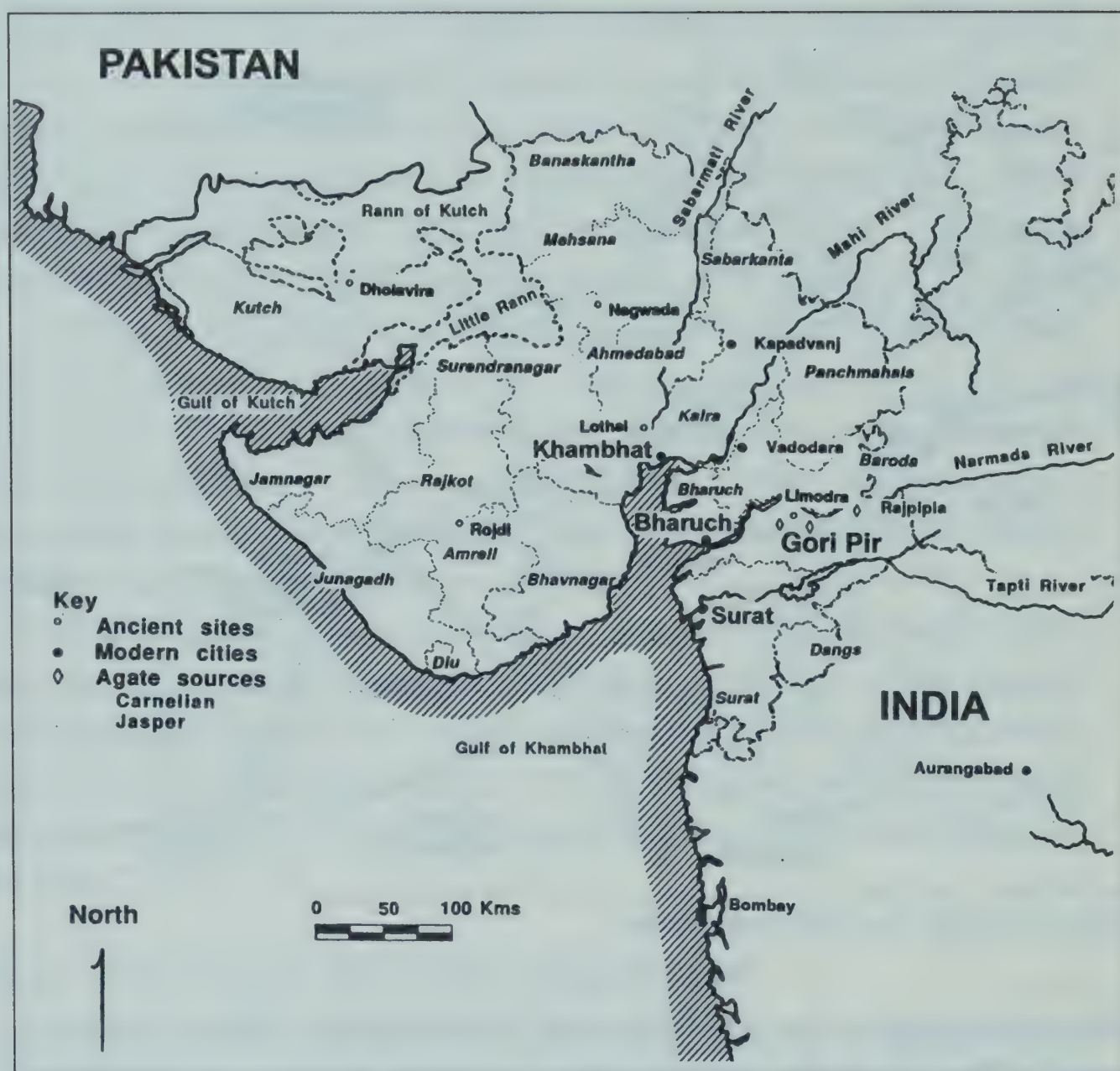
Figure 2



Map of Arabian Sea and Trade Routes

was considered to be an 'Ethiopian' town (Wink 1990) (Figures 2 and 3). One might assume that this meant the presence of significant Ethiopian merchants, traders, and administrators and that the administration of the city was dominated by Ethiopians. Unfortunately there is no South Asian evidence to support this claim. Based on coins and inscriptions found in Western India, this was a period of time during which Bharuch was under the rule of Nahapan of the Saka-Kshatrapas (Rajyagor 1982: 69). Nevertheless, there was considerable trade with western regions during the period between 20 BC to 217 AD and during the Kshatrapa period many sites in Gujarat and Sindh show evidence of Greek and Roman artifacts. Since we have considerable evidence of Roman and Byzantine sea contact with Africa, especially Ethiopia, it is not unlikely that Ethiopians and other black Africans were involved in the trade and also reached the shores of South Asia. With careful excavations in the city of Broach and its environs, it might be possible to determine if Ethiopian individuals actually lived there during the early centuries AD.

Figure 3



Gujarat and Major Towns

A later reference in the second century records the presence of an established slave trade of black Africans who were sold into slavery by local rulers to traders along the Arabian peninsula and then sold throughout the coastal communities of the Arabian Sea (Wink 1990). By this time, it is not unlikely that some Africans were present in the region, either as traders, mercenaries or slaves. We know that Ethiopian traders, mercenaries and slaves were common in towns of the Arabian peninsula, such as Mecca. These communities appear to have played an important role in the commerce and everyday activities of the region and the Prophet Muhammad declared that no 'holy war' was to be carried out against them. At this time, most of the Ethiopians in Arabia and adjacent regions were probably Christian, and associated with the Aksumite kingdom that converted to Christianity in the 4th century (Wink 1990: 47). However, we also know

that one of the first converts to Islam was a black slave named Bilal, and that subsequently many black slaves were converted and in some cases freed. It is assumed that the black slaves in Arabia included individuals of Ethiopian origin, as well as people from the interior and eastern Africa.

Once a person living in Arabia had been converted to Islam, they often became identified to outsiders as Arab even if they were ethnically quite distinct from the natives of the Arabian peninsula. Consequently, when we read that the trade dominance of Ethiopians (i.e. Ethiopian Christians) was eclipsed by Arab traders (Wink 1990: 28), it is not clear if these Arab traders are actually individuals ethnically related to Arab nomad communities or if some of them were Muslims of Ethiopian origin living in Arabia. This situation makes it very difficult to use written texts to determine when African traders or merchant communities arrived in the subcontinent since they may have been referred to as Arabs rather than as Habshi or Zanj. Archaeological excavations, however, might provide one way to identify early African communities in India.

Another way to investigate this question is through the study of oral traditions. If you were to ask any Sidi in Gujarat where they came from, they would probably say that they originally came from Africa, either directly or via Arabia. In the current information age, with the widespread availability of modern literature, films, and TV, most Sidi communities along the coasts of India and Pakistan have developed strong associations with Africa. In fact, many Sidis say that they are African, but most individuals are unable to provide details about where in Africa they originally came from or how they ended up in the subcontinent.

There are however, a few elders who have provided us with a more detailed history of their movement from Ethiopia or Abyssinia, through Arabia, and eventually to the Makran, and then Gujarat or South India. One of our main informants was the late Sidi Kamar Badshah, an outspoken leader of the Sidi community, who lived near the famous hill called Gori Pir, in Broach district. Many aspects of Kamar Badshah's accounts match well with what earlier scholars had recorded from interviews with his ancestors, but we were also able to obtain some interesting new insights.

Gori Pir and the Agate Industry

According to interviews with Kamar Badshah taken over the past ten years, one of the first Sidis to arrive in agate mining regions near Rajpipla was Gori Pir, who came with his twelve brothers. He did not know if there were any Africans in the region prior to the arrival of Gori Pir, but was able to confirm that Gori Pir originally came from Ethiopia, which would have included a wider region than that of the modern nation and may have included modern Yemen. Gori Pir travelled to Mecca where he stayed for some time before moving on to the Makran coast near modern Karachi. After arriving on the subcontinent he spent many years wandering as a religious mendicant and bead trader. He stayed in eleven different localities and Sidi communities in these different regions still have festivals in his memory. He travelled in the Makran and Sindh, and stayed at the shrine of Mungho Pir near modern day Karachi, where even today there is a large Sidi community who gather for the Urs of Mungho Pir. He eventually travelled throughout Saurashtra, north Gujarat and finally settled in Nadod, which is the modern town of Rajpipla. Here he established an agate bead workshop and then expanded his business to other major towns such as Limbodara and ports such as Khambhat. Some of his brothers, one of whom was not a Sidi (Bava Savan), assisted him in the bead industry which produced various types of agate beads for export to Africa and the Near East, as well as to regions in East and South East Asia. The Tomb of Bava Savan is located at the edge of Khambhat town.

An older story provides a bit more detail on the motivation for coming to Gujarat and setting up a bead factory (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Native States* 1877: 168). In this account there was a temple on the top of the hill that is now called Gori Pir (Figure 4). The goddess Makhan Devi (Butter Goddess) lived on the hill and near her a lamp, fed by fifty pounds of butter, burned continuously. The light of the lamp was so strong that it was visible as far away as Mecca. According to the legend, the Prophet Muhammad of Mecca noticed the light and asked Shaikh Gori Sidi (Gori Pir) to investigate its source. As Gori Pir approached the hill, the goddess Makhan Devi sank into the ground and Gori Pir set up his residence and a workshop. If this tradition is true, then Gori Pir would have arrived in Gujarat sometime during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (570

Figure 4



Gori Pir Hill

AD to 632 AD), almost a century before the conquest of Sindh by the Arabs in 711 AD. While this tradition does not seem to be supported by other historical and oral traditions, the association of Gori Pir with the Prophet Muhammad probably reflects a legitimisation of their Islamic heritage and mission.

According to Sidi Kamar Badshah, when Makhan Devi sank into the ground her long braid was left sticking out, but Gori Pir was unable to destroy the goddess because he was a man and could not touch her. He sent for help from his sister Mai Mishra. Because she was a woman, it was possible for her to attack the goddess, which she did by taking her shoe and beating on the braid until it was swallowed up in the ground. Other traditions say that after twelve years Gori Pir's sister Mai Mishra and his younger brother Bava Habash came looking for him and then stayed to live with him and help him with his business. When Mai Mishra died she was buried in a tomb located at the southwest corner of the modern platform holding the tomb of Gori Pir. Bava Habash is buried to the southeast on a low hill.

Sidi Agate Working Communities

At present Sidi communities are spread throughout the regions of Gujarat, Sindh and Makran, but only those living in the Gori Pir and

Khambhat areas are involved in the agate trade. When Gori Pir set up his first workshop in Rajpipla he undoubtedly had important contacts with mining communities in the area around Gori Pir Hill and that is probably when the Sidi community first became established in its vicinity. At present there is a village of Sidis (Figure 5) along with a community of Bhils who are involved in the actual mining of agates (Figure 6). No surveys of the region have been done to determine if there were larger settlements of Sidis in the areas around the Gori Pir Hill, but it is assumed that only small settlements were located in this area since most people would have lived in the larger towns of Jagadia, Limbodra, and Rajpipla. Up until the 19th century, the teak jungles around Gori Pir Hill were probably quite dangerous to live in, because of the many tigers and leopards. In fact, some of the legends refer to Gori Pir as someone whom the tigers obeyed, and if anyone was attacked by a tiger they only needed to call on the saint and the tiger would stop eating them (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Native States* 1877: 168).

Later, Gori Pir set up a workshop at Limbodara which is nearer to Gori Pir Hill than Rajpipla. The main market city and port for

Figure 5



Sidi Village with Agate Stockpile, near Gori Pir Hill

Figure 6



Bhil miners near Gori Pir Hill

trading agate beads was Bharuch, which had sea trade with the ports on the Red Sea, in East Africa and throughout the Persian Gulf regions. But as the bay at Bharuch gradually silted up, the main port shifted to Khambhat. This shift began to impact the agate bead industry around 1500, when several European travellers make mention of agate workshops in Khambhat (Janaki 1980: 27). We know that one of the brothers of Gori Pir was sent to Khambhat to set up business there, and one would assume that it was around this time. Nevertheless, Limbodara continued to be an important craft center and agate nodules were being processed there until the 1850s. We can only assume that the Sidis were actively involved in this trade since in 1832 a colony of Sidis was reported at Limbodara by Captain Fulljames (1838/1839). Today agate working debris litters the site, but no one practices the trade. A large ruined mosque testifies to the presence of a substantial Muslim community at Limbodara and an extensive Muslim cemetery is found on one of the old city mounds. No Sidi community lives on the site today, but they still come there from nearby settlements to bury their dead and pay respects to their ancestors.

The major workshops of agate bead making were shifted from Limbodara and Bharuch to Khambhat in the 14th century when Bharuch lost its prominence as a port city. Many Sidis appear to have also shifted to Khambhat, but here they were in the minority, as the city was filled with many competing workshops run by various communities (Muslim, Jain and Hindu). The Sidis who remained in the Limbodara and Gori Pir Hill area appear to have been able to maintain their traditional role as craftsmen and middlemen up until quite recently. Today, however, due to the shift in mining areas and restrictions by the forest department, the Sidi community is no longer in an economically important location for selection and stockpiling of agates. They do still continue to sell beads at the tomb of Gori Pir, but these beads are now made in Khambhat, often by other communities.

Gori Pir Hill

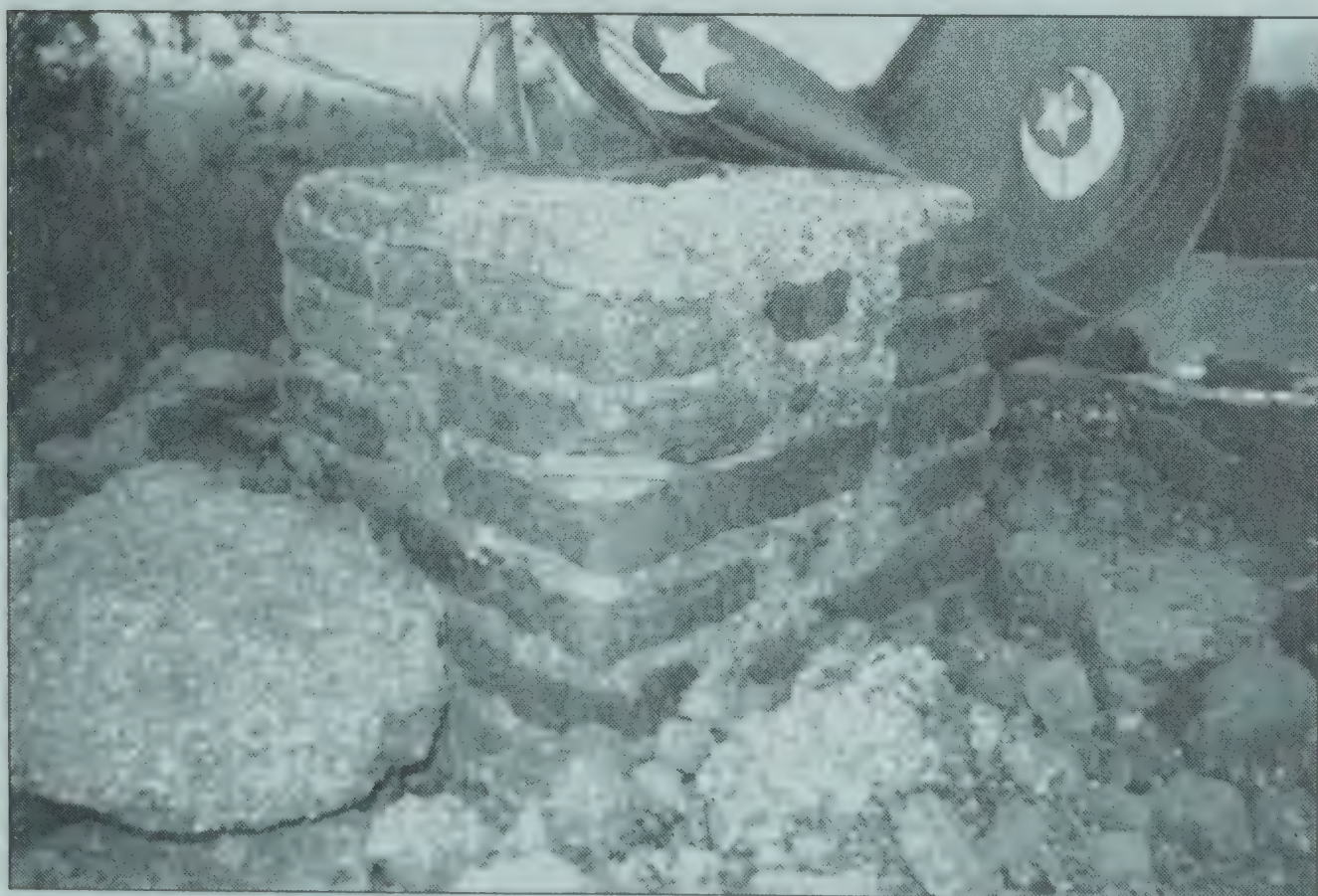
The authors have made numerous trips to Gori Pir Hill and documented significant archaeological remains that help to reconstruct the history of this important site. These observations can provide some context for the oral traditions of Kamar Badshah as well as other early Sidi informants. As to the presence of a temple on top of the hill, there is in fact evidence for several structures that may represent a fairly substantial temple complex. Up until the 1990s the pathway up to the tombs was made up of large white stone steps. Upon closer examination, these blocks turned out to be blocks from earlier temples with elaborate carvings and some fragmentary images. The style of carving suggests that the temples date to around 1100 AD.

The location of the tomb of Gori Pir is at the base of a much higher peak on which the foundations of a stone temple were found. The size of the bricks (36 x 24 x 6 cm) suggests that they may date to the Saka-Kshatrapa period around 78–399 AD. The combination of stone and brick construction will require more detailed analysis and eventually excavation, but it probably reflects the rebuilding of an older brick temple with a stone temple. The carved marble facings may have been added to the exterior of this or another temple. A brick rubble wall of later construction was found at the east end of the temple foundation. Further down the slope to the south is a flat area that may have been the location of another large building or

courtyard. To the west along the ridge are several stone wall fragments and the remains of a large stone tank that even today collects rain water. At the westernmost promontory of the ridge is a modern plinth or boundary marker made from old bricks that can also be dated to the Saka-Kshatrapa period (Figure 7). One of the bricks has an inscribed motif of a circle with a line through it. On the ground next to this plinth was a large stone channel from a stone *yonil-lingam* that would have been in a temple to Shiva. The Kshatrapa rulers generally adopted Shaivism as their main state religion and this would fit well with the presence of a Shiva temple and a temple to the Goddess. Additional monumental stone columns and blocks are found scattered along the southern slope of the hill and a large stone lined well is found in the low area leading to the tomb of Bava Habash that is located to the southeast of Gori Pir's tomb (Figure 8).

Since the tomb of Gori Pir is not built on top of the earlier temple and no mosque has ever been constructed using the ruined temples, it would suggest that perhaps the temples were still in use or only recently abandoned when his tomb was established on the hill. Eventually with the vagaries of conquest and warfare, the earlier Hindu and possibly Jain temples were abandoned and disman-

Figure 7



Kshtrapa bricks in plinth

Figure 8



View to the tomb of Bava Habas

tled while the Muslim tomb and associated Sidi rituals such as the *goma* dance continued. It is important to note that many local Hindus visit the tomb of Gori Pir and members of all communities come to the tomb for trials by ordeal that are conducted by the Sidi caretakers. One of the trials is to have chains placed around the ankles and then the accused is required to run rapidly up the steps shouting the name of Gori Pir. If they are innocent the chains will fall off, but if they are guilty the chains will not come undone. We have observed ordeals where the chains did come off and ones where they did not come off.

Given the fact that the hill of Gori Pir had a well established temple complex that dated from as early as 78–399 AD to around 1100–1300 AD, it is not unlikely that there was quite a substantial community of miners, bead craftsmen and traders who frequented the area. In view of the long history of trade from Bharuch to the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, it is also not unlikely that traders, mercenaries, and slaves of African origin would have been present in this region. However, the production of agate beads and the control of the industry would have been firmly in the hands of Jain and Hindu merchants with little or no opportunities for Muslim traders.

We know from the historical records that the region was dominated by Hindu and Jain rulers with only intermittent raids by Muslims until 1298 AD when Gujarat came under the dominance of the Khalaji and Tughaluq Sultans of Delhi (1298–1573) (Rajyagor 1982: 141–42). With the change in political control it would have been possible for Muslim traders and merchants to establish their own workshops and develop their own new trading contacts. The expanding trade with Africa, Arabia, and Southeast Asia clearly contributed to the growth and development of ports and cities along the west coast of India during this time. Most scholars agree that Gori Pir arrived in the region sometime during the 15th century, when the region around Gori Pir emerged as a major center of the agate trade (*Gazetteer of India, Gujarat State: Kheda District* 1977: 805). During this period of reorganisation, Gori Pir was able to set up competitive workshops that catered to newly emerging markets in Africa and Arabia that were previously untapped by the Hindu and Jain merchants. It is in this context of growth and development that the Sidi community made its initial contributions to the agate bead industry. In later periods, when the region was controlled by the Mughals (1573–1758) (Rajyagor 1982), we see the further expansion of trade and eventual interaction with the European markets. In the following section we will outline the various ways in which Sidi communities continued to play an important role in the bead trade throughout the Mughal, colonial and modern period.

Agate Bead Making

In the regions where Sidi communities are present we have evidence for stone bead manufacture going back to the third millennium BC. Based on the discussion above, the historical figure Gori Pir does not appear on the scene until quite late in the history of this technology. So one could ask how he was able to make a place for himself in an industry that had such a long and established history. The answer lies in his ability to develop new, more efficient techniques for processing raw materials, for producing new styles of beads and in finding markets that were not being exploited by earlier merchants. In order to follow the different ways in which the Sidi communities have influenced the bead industry we must look at the entire process, from mining to shaping and marketing the beads.

Mining

The first stage of production is the mining and selection of agate nodules that will eventually be processed into specific types of beads. In Gujarat the major mining area is located approximately 80 to 100 kilometers from Khambhat in Bharuch district. The mining activities have concentrated in the relatively accessible agate bearing gravels exposed in tilted beds at the foot of Gori Pir Hill (Trivedi 1964: 7–11). Although most of the miners are local Bhil tribals, we were informed by some of the local Sidis near Gori Pir Hill that when necessary, they also get involved in the actual mining. Today, the more common role for Sidis, however, is in the selection and sorting of nodules mined by the Bhils. As miners or middlemen, Gori Pir and early Sidis selected varieties of stone that were of desirable colour and quality for the markets in Africa and Arabia. This clearly provided them with a key role in the newly expanding bead industry.

Drying and Heating

Once the nodules have been mined, the next stage of production is drying to remove as much moisture as possible prior to firing. The period of drying varies depending on the market pressure for finished goods, but generally speaking, the longer they dry in the sun, the less chance for cracking in the heating process (Kenoyer, Vidale and Bhan 1991). Drying is often begun by the middlemen in the mining areas, and as mentioned above the initial heating used to be carried out by Sidis in Limbodara. It is not unlikely that one of the important contributions of Gori Pir was in developing a more precise method for determining which agates should be heated and how much to heat them. This may be why some of the agates were referred to as *bavagor*. One of the most highly desired form of agate are the deep blood-red carnelians that must be heated slowly and repeatedly to avoid breakage. Prayer beads and pendants made from this type of carnelian were in great demand in the Islamic world and were among the major products of the workshops in Limbodara. When the authors visited the site they found large areas covered with deep red carnelian flakes that were discarded during the manufacturing process.

Red carnelian was being produced as early as the Harappan period (2500 BC) and is relatively common throughout the early Bud-

Figure 9



Mass production heating techniques

dhist period, and the process of heating certain agates to enhance their colour was not a new discovery. However, the mass production of red carnelian beads for large scale trade would have required a very different approach from that practised by the earlier workshops. It is in the scale of production that Gori Pir may have excelled and thereby gained fame in the agate industry. Many of the heating techniques currently used in Khambhat may have had their origins in the techniques perfected by Gori Pir and the Sidis (Figure 9).

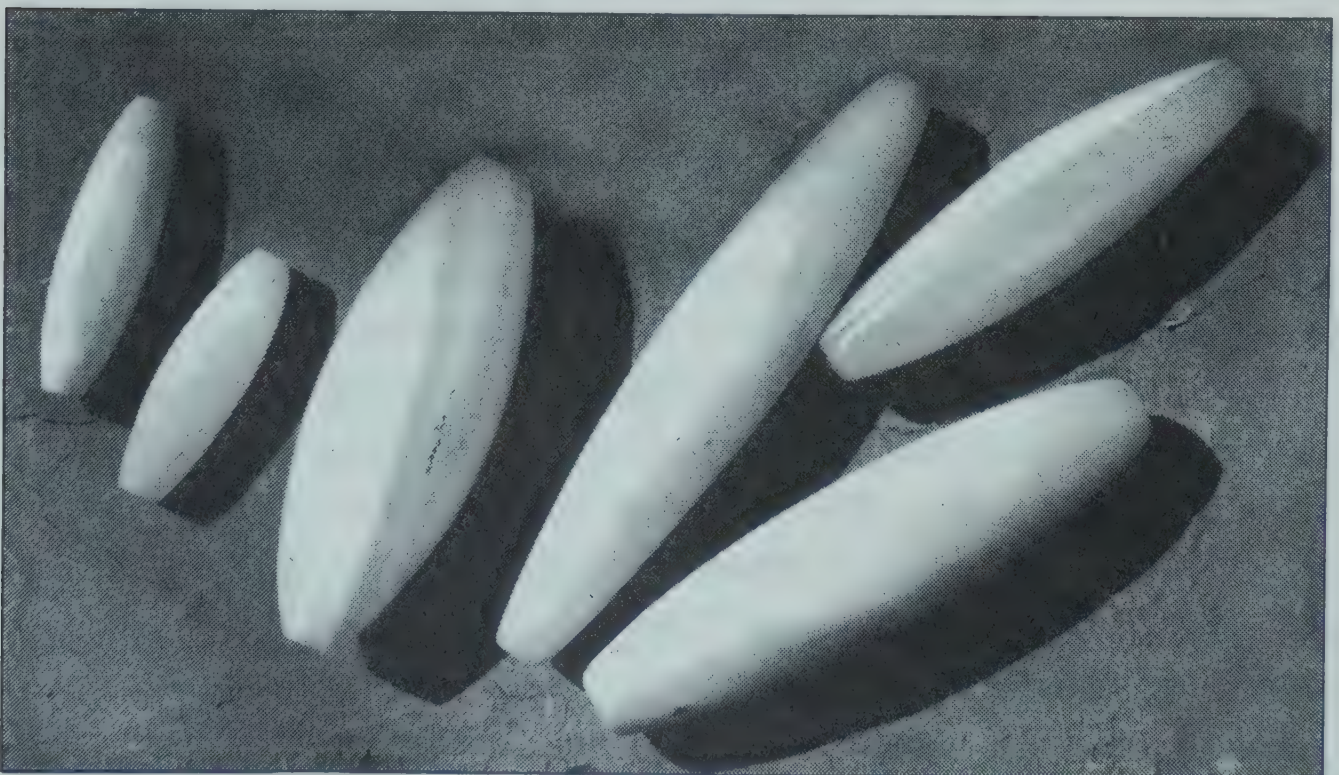
Bead Styles and Shapes

During the past several hundred years, many different types of agate beads and pendants were traded with Africa and the Arabian Gulf region. As mentioned above, one variety of agate that seems to have been very popular was actually referred to as *bavagor* after the man who first processed it and made it available. Although we know the name of this agate there is some confusion as to the precise nature of the *bavagor* stone. Today, Sidi bead merchants refer to red carnelian beads as 'bavagor' but it is not unlikely that the term may have been used for various types of beads produced from the workshops of Gori Pir.

While there are no Sidi workshops available for study today, it is possible to get an idea of the types of beads that were produced for trade to Africa and the Islamic world based on beads from archaeological excavations and those still produced in various workshops in Khambhat today. Some of the oldest forms are carnelian bicones and barrel-shaped beads as well as short to long-faceted beads. Large white agate barrel beads called *dudhia* (i.e. milky) were also in high demand among some communities in East and Central Africa (Figure 10). White banded agate is not available in Khambhat, and the raw materials had to be obtained further inland in Central and South India. Long rectangular carnelian beads called *modan* were produced particularly for trade to Nigeria in West Africa. Specific types of dagger-shaped pendants were also being produced for trade to Sudan and eventually to West Africa. In addition to the African trade there were numerous bead types that fetched a good price in Arabia. These include spherical carnelian and rock crystal used to make prayer beads, as well as the special shapes for handles and counters. Many different styles of flower pendants were also produced using carnelian. Another style of bead that was popular in the Arab world was flat amulets that could be carved with verses from the Koran.

In addition to numerous bead and pendant types, the agate workers of Limbodara and later of Khambhat produced a wide variety of other

Figure 10



Dudhia (Milky) agate beads for Africa trade

commodities that were in great demand throughout the subcontinent and beyond. These included agate handles for swords, agate mortar and pestles for making fine medicines, stud buttons for shirts and entire signet rings as well as polished ring settings that could also be carved with a name or sacred verse. The veritable explosion of agate commodities during the 15th century does not need to be entirely attributed to Gori Pir, but there is little doubt that he and his family played a significant role in selecting the types of objects that would sell well in distant Africa and Arabia. The importance of Gori Pir to the agate industry and as a spiritual leader for the general public is reflected in the fact that even today, more than five hundred years after his death, he is revered by both Muslim and Hindu craftsmen who travel to his tomb at Gori Pir or leave offerings at his cenotaph in Khambhat.

Trade

Once Gori Pir had set up his workshops, it is known that many other Muslim and Hindu merchants quickly followed his lead, resulting in a highly competitive and vibrant economy (Janaki 1980:27). Based on recent trade networks and interviews with Hindu and Jain merchants, it is clear that they dominated the trade of agate and other processed stones that were being shipped to the inland towns and distant communities within the subcontinent. In contrast, although some Hindu and Jain traders were present in East Africa, the Muslim/Arab traders, including Sidis, clearly dominated the sea trade and would have been the major players in the trade of agate beads and pendants to Africa and Arabia (Janaki 1969: 11).

Conclusion

In trying to understand the history and role of the Sidi community in the agate bead industry, we have been seriously handicapped by the lack of explicit historical documents. However, when the few written sources are combined with oral traditions and archaeology, it is possible to bring important new perspectives to the long and varied history of the Sidi community. Today the Sidi families who used to be involved in the agate bead trade have gradually adapted to changing economic conditions and followed new opportunities. However, even though they no longer play a significant role in agate mining, agate bead making or agate bead trade, it is important to recognise

the important contributions that they made to this industry. In fact, many of the styles first produced in the 15th century are still being made and marketed throughout the world. From China to Arabia, and even in the Americas, carnelian beads, *bavagor*, continue to be used for prayer, adornment and decoration.

Acknowledgements

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Redefining Boundaries

Twenty Years at the Shrine of Gori Pir

Helene Basu

The shrine (*dargah*) of the Muslim-Sidi saint Gori Pir represents a sacred place of major importance for the Sidi (ca. 10,000), African Gujaratis who have settled in many areas in the modern state of Gujarat. In this paper, I shall describe recent events that are transforming the shrine from a site of resistance and autonomy of people placed at the bottom of Gujarati society into a mainstream Islamic site. Islamising processes which tend to erase local constructions of belief and practices have been described from various angles; for example, as a state induced process in Pakistan (Ewing 1997: 65ff.), or as a result of changed religious values of migrants returning to Bangladesh (Gardener 1997). In this case, changes brought about by state intervention into the organisation of the shrine were met by contests and conflicts on the micro-level between those who had formerly defined the *dargah* as common ritual property. The changes most visible at the shrine of Gori Pir concern a tendency to redefine boundaries between different categories of people and to establish firmer boundaries between followers on religious grounds.

Until the 1980s, the *dargah* of Gori Pir in Gujarat had been a meeting ground for people from diverse socio-religious communities sharing the belief in the power of Muslim-Sidi saints (*pirs*). Previously, the shrine had been dominated by the poor and the marginalised. The *dargah* attracted low Hindu castes, Adivasi (Bhils), Muslims of various communities (*jamat*) and even a few Parsis.¹ However, since the 1990s a shift in the plural character of the *dargah* clientele could be observed through which a more homogeneous Muslim shrine fol-

lowing emerged. The social process which led to the marginalisation and gradual exclusion of non-Muslims, however, seems closely linked to the growing influence of communalism in postcolonial Gujarat with its essentialising ideology (Nandy et al 1995: 103ff). While communal ideologies gained an enormous momentum amongst the lower and middle classes in Gujarat in the last two decades, their practical effects are felt nowadays also by those at the bottom of society who had managed to subsist in religious niches that were socially removed from middle-class influence. Thus, in the following chapter symbolic transformations of space at the *dargah* of Gori Pir will be described through which the effects of communal ideology become manifest amongst people who otherwise do not consciously subscribe to it. The paper is divided into three parts. The first deals briefly with the history of the *dargah* and with the emergence of improvised shrine practices. State intervention into *dargah* affairs in the mid-1970s marked a break in the emergence of the cult from below. The second part of the paper focuses upon the contest between two Sidi leaders regarding the changes in the organisation of the shrine. The third part of the paper describes manifestations of Islamisation through appropriation of ritual space accompanied by a progressive homogenisation of the cult clientele.

The Shrine of Gori Pir in the Past

The earliest reference to a tomb of a Muslim saint called Gori Pir is found in the writings of the Muslim historian ad-Dabir of the 16th century. Ad-Dabir reported that Mahmud Khilji (1436–1469), the first Khilji ruler of Malwa, undertook a pilgrimage in the year 1451 to the tomb of an ‘Abyssinian’ saint called Gori Pir during a military campaign through South Gujarat (Lokhandwala 1970: 4). Although there is no mention of ritual caretakers at the tomb, several hundred years later one hears of former African slaves having settled at this shrine. In the first half of the 19th century British colonial officers visited the area in search of the carnelian mines when they met Sidi (‘negroes’) custodians at the shrine of Gori Pir (Copland 1819: 294–95; Fulljames 1838/1839: 76). At that time, the *dargah* was situated in a small princely state ruled by Hindu kings of the Gohil Rajput lineage. The larger part of the kingdom consisted of forests and hilly tracts which were inhabited mainly by Adivasi communities, espe-

cially Bhil. From the middle of the 19th century until 1948, when princely states were merged with the Indian Union after Independence, the shrine and its Sidi custodians held a royal grant (*inam*) to collect a share of the harvest from five villages.

Sidi *Fakirs*

The shrine had provided dispersed African slaves with a material base for subsistence which helped to form a Sidi *fakir* organisation referred to as a Sufi path (*tariqa*). The *dargah* of Gori Pir began to attract Sidi from all over the region, often individuals, slaves or servants who had fled from their masters. Through Sidi agency, the shrine was turned into a place of freedom for formerly enslaved Sidi and those who were tied to a master as servants. Many individual Africans, free or formerly enslaved, are remembered by older Sidi to have found their way to the shrine where they joined the existing *fakir* order of the Sidi. Initiation into the *fakir* order seems to have contributed to the formation of a distinct Sidi community (*jamat*) (Basu 2000). Since the 19th century, Sidi *fakirs* often led a wandering life. They moved in small groups, often men with wife and children, who sang songs in praise of Gori Pir and other Sidi saints, danced and collected alms from the people in towns and villages (Desai 1912). Sidi instruments and music still retain African elements, and the *malunga*, a string instrument of African origin, became an emblem of Sidi *fakirs*.² The specifics of Sidi *fakir* practices were made manifest in the style of singing referred to as *jhikkar*,³ drumming and dances known as *goma* or *dammal*.⁴ Through the interpretation of musical styles in a religious idiom the Sidi distinguish themselves from other musicians and ritual specialists in the region and define their spiritual identity as *fakirs*. A characteristic of the Sidi *fakir tariqa* consisted in the active involvement of women in the 'work of *fakirs*' (*fakir nu kam*). Single Sidi women could join the *fakir* order by being initiated, but more often the wives of *fakirs* and ritual office holders joined their husbands in various ritual activities. Sidi *fakirs* met and closely interacted with Muslim *fakirs* of other orders, such as, for example, the Malangs, as well as with Hindu ascetics (*sadhus*) of different renouncer traditions. The boundaries between different groups of itinerant *fakirs* and ascetics were drawn in relation to specific ritual practices, whereas affiliation with the larger religious community did not seem to be of much im-

portance.⁵ Thus, Sidi *fakirs* also venerated the Hindu god Hanuman and participated in one of the most important regional Hindu festivals which is attended by hundreds of individual ascetics and orders: the annual Mahashivratri *kumbh mela* at Mount Girnar in Junagadh.

The Village of Sidi *Fakirs*

Sidi *fakirs* who managed the site of Gori Pir settled in a village adjacent to the shrine. Today, the village is divided into two hamlets separated by fields and forests. The larger hamlet is composed of about one hundred households of Bhil, while the smaller one consists of twenty Sidi houses. Both, Bhils and Sidi, own small plots of land where grain and vegetables are grown. While the majority of Bhils are cultivators, most Sidi have farmed out their land to Bhil peasants on a sharecropping basis. In everyday life, Sidi and Bhil interact closely. Although the Sidi amongst themselves use a local form of Urdu (Hindustani), with members of the Bhil community they speak in the Bhil dialect of Gujarati. At the shrine and in Sidi households, men and women living in the Bhil hamlet are sometimes employed for helping with manual work (e.g. carrying water, collecting firewood, etc.). Sidi and Bhil also call each other's ritual specialists in times of crises. For example, when a Sidi woman feels affected by the evil eye (*nazar*) and suspects that it had been cast by an envious neighbour, she would seek remedy from a Bhil woman known for her healing powers. Conversely, Bhils would seek a cure from the shrine of Gori Pir in case of evil spirit possession or witchcraft. Occasionally, even marriages between Sidi and Bhil took—and still take—place. Both Bhil and Sidi consume meat (including beef), although as Muslims Sidis do not eat pork. However, a dividing line is drawn, at least from a Sidi perspective, by the Bhil's heavy consumption of liquor to which the Sidi as good Muslims strictly object.

With regard to the larger context of the Sidi community (*jamat*), whose members lived widely distributed over towns and villages in Gujarat, Sidi *fakirs* living in the village function as organisers of the worship of Sidi saints on behalf not only of the whole community, but also on behalf of other, non-Sidi, believers and followers of the *dargah*. Moreover, the organisation of the *dargah* implied a system of redistribution that recognised corporate rights of Sidi to a share in the donations and alms given at the *dargah*. The occasion for receiv-

ing a share of the *dargah* wealth arose during the annual saint's day celebration (*urs*), when large groups of Sidi from all over Gujarat gathered for performing ritual dancing (*goma*, *dammal*).

According to Sidi narratives, during the twentieth century, a modestly hierarchical shrine-organisation with different tasks assigned to different ritual roles had been established by Sidi *fakirs*. Previously, the routine had been improvised. Old people remembered their own elders having talked about a ritual headman (*gaddivaras*) who is credited with having founded the organisational rules which were in use until the 1970s. Thus, *fakirs* had been related as 'ritual father/teacher' (*murshid*) and 'ritual child' (*balka*) to each other. From this circle, the ritual headman (*gaddivaras*) was selected on the basis of his personal charisma. Since the middle of the twentieth century, a more regulated but still improvised order characterised the organisation of the shrine. The headman had assigned specific tasks to different *fakirs* from the village from amongst his relatives who now represented a ritual office.⁶ In addition, the wives (and often daughters) of ritual office holders went with their men to the shrine as well. Most of today's twenty Sidi households living in the village adjacent to the *dargah* trace patri- and matrilineal ties to the founder headman in the third or fourth generation. These ties were later evoked in order to legitimise claims to rights of controlling the shrine affairs.

The Saints (*Pirs*) and the Sidi

The name Gori Pir encompasses a group of three major saints, two brothers and one sister, who are said to have come from Africa. All three saints possess power to perform miracles and to intervene into reality. In the mythical charter narrated by the Sidi, Gori Pir was a military commander sent from Africa to Mecca and from Mecca to India in order to fight against a demoness. Neither he nor his younger brother Bava Habash, however, could accomplish this mission because Islamic rules of modesty forbade them to fight against a female, even though she was a demoness whose evil rule had made fertile lands barren. The final victory was left to Mai Mishra, the sister, who ultimately overpowered the demoness (for details, see Basu 1995: 74ff). The powers of Mai Mishra also extend to interventions in the actual life of her devotees: like a male saint she can perform miracles, such as, for example, making people rich overnight, saving a

person from going to prison or stopping a train for the benefit of a late traveller. In addition to these common miraculous capabilities (*karamat*) she also holds power over evil spirits.

These three Sidi *pirs* are, moreover, distinguished from each other according to specific powers. The most universal powers are attributed to Gori Pir, the bringer of Islam and arbiter of moral-juridical conflicts. In contrast to this, the powers of Bava Habash and Mai Mishra are more circumscribed and closely related to issues of gender and sexuality. Mai Mishra protects the interests of women, as, for example, transforming a bad into a good husband and making the barren fertile. A similar specific function in relation to the interests of men, especially in regard to marital life, is attributed to Bava Habash who can turn impotent men into potent ones.

Sidi constructions of religiosity emphasise 'carnavalesque' features expressed by ritually mocking and ridiculing the gestures and claims of those in power. Great stress is placed upon joking, in ordinary as well as ritual contexts. Often, individual Sidi men and women present themselves as jokers and jesters. Thus, the highest goal professed by Sidi *fakirs* was to give pleasure, fun, enjoyment (*majha*). To evoke pleasure is regarded as the gift Sidi saints give to those who believed in them. Moreover, the Sidi task consisted in transforming the suffering which caused believers to visit the shrine into pleasure and enjoyment. This transformation was experienced in the ecstasy of Sidi during ritual dancing sessions (*goma*). This kind of religiosity did not emphasise unambiguous surrender to a superior power; on the contrary, it aimed at creating a counter-world in which claims to authority and power could be proved hollow.

The Shrine Followers

The *dargah* of Gori Pir was not only a centre for Sidi *fakirs* but also a regional shrine which attracted lay followers from the area. As indicated above, its saints were renowned for three specific functions: curing illnesses caused by spirit possession, curing barrenness in women and impotence in men and, last but not least, giving judgements through an ordeal.

The personal characteristics attributed to the Sidi saints are marked by a polyvalence which allows for the accommodation of different religious conceptions held by a heterogeneous cult follow-

ing. By eclectically combining and mixing Sufi, Bhil, Hindu and African cultural elements, the cult of Gori Pir can be understood as a new, uniquely creolised cultural production that has been brought about by the interactions of Sidi with their social environment.

In this setting, different meanings could be attached by those who called themselves believers of Gori Pir (*goripirvale*). Muslim believers particularly stress the message of Islam brought by Gori Pir and his relationship to the Sufi context. Shrine narratives relate Gori Pir to the hierarchical network of other Sufi *pirs* in Gujarat, especially to Ahmad Kabir Rifa'i and the Rifa'i order (Basu 1996). The shrine culture was framed around Sufi forms of worship including the regular performance of *qawwali* (Sufi devotional music) as a means to experience spiritual communion with the saints. Until the 1980s, most of the Muslim followers of the shrine had initially sought the support and miraculous powers of the Sidi saints for solving a personal problem. Afterwards, they and their families remained faithful to them and continued to worship them. Often, the relationship to the shrine has been inherited by the next generation.

The cultural gender idiom underlying the discourse of the cult and the presence of female sacred persons, moreover, allowed for the intelligibility of different conceptions of female divine powers. Drawing upon the structure of the Hindu pantheon, Mai Mishra seems to represent a Sidi/Muslim version of the notion of female power or *shakti*. Like Hindu gods, Gori Pir and Bava Habash are not able to act without the infusion of female power. For the Sidi, in addition to the features of gendered powers, what matters most is the special type of relationship that connects contemporary Sidi with heroic, powerful African ancestors in the past.⁷ The Sidi claim to have received a share of spiritual power (*karamat*) from them, as well as the obligation to mediate between the ancestor-saints and their believers.⁸

Bhil followers saw in the *dargah* mainly a place of powers that could tame evil spirits and witches. Sidi *fakirs* were called *bhagat*, i.e. by the same term which in the Bhil religious idiom denotes spirit-mediums for the smallpox goddess Sitala Mata. People go to a *bhagat* with symptoms of possession by an evil spirit (*bhut*). During the curing ceremony held in the house of the afflicted the *bhagat* is possessed by the goddess. In persistent cases of possession, people then sought a cure at the *dargah* of Gori Pir. As a remedy Sidi *fakirs* usually

demanding to visit the *dargah* at least five times. There, people were left to themselves to await the order (*hukm*) of one of the three saints. Once the order was received, the afflicted person (mostly women) settled next to the tomb of that Pir and fell into a trance (*dhune chhe*). In the state of possession-trance, the person enacted the fight between the saint and the evil spirit. Closely watched by relatives who waited for signs that the evil spirit (*bhut*) would be ready to leave the body, the afflicted person was brought to the tomb of the female saint (Mai Mishra). Here, a spirit was ultimately conquered and banned. The tomb was shadowed by a tree whose trunk was covered with big nails each holding a small bundle of hair. As spirits are thought to reside in the hair, pieces of hair nailed to the tree symbolise an overpowered spirit that has left the human body and returned to the tree and earth. Other perceived evils that could befall the Bhil community and from which one sought to protect it, arose from acts of witchcraft. Spirit possession and witchcraft were conceived as powerful and dangerous forces in human life. Female infertility and infant mortality, in particular, were said by Bhil to be caused by witches who are usually women. Witches are especially feared for their power to destroy fertility, as for example by preventing women from getting pregnant or destroying the foetus. Women of the Bhils accused of being witches were brought to the *dargah* of Gori Pir and were forced to undergo a ritual of ordeal (*bedi*). The ordeal should prove their guilt or innocence.⁹

Not only Bhil, but also believers (*goripirvale*) of other religious affiliations sought a remedy for afflictions perceived in the idiom of evil spirit possession at the shrine of Gori Pir. Women from diverse socio-religious backgrounds, such as members of Bhil, Hindu, Muslim and even Parsi communities, sat next to each other around the shrines of the Sidi saints, acting out their personal dramas of being possessed by an evil spirit. Similarly, both Hindus and Muslims made use of the moral-judicial function of the shrine. For example, people accused of theft by an employer, often the owner of a small factory or a shopkeeper, were brought to the shrine for the ordeal.

The liminal space of the *dargah* provided an arena which allowed for boundary crossings and for the accommodation of difference. Social, ethnic or religious constructions of identity were treated dismissively. What tied the community of believers together were

patron-client relationships determined by the worship of Sidi saints. The Sidi propagated a liberating message of their saints promising relief from suffering. This message did not imply profession of or conversion to a single religion, rather, it was addressed to any human being (*inshan*) suffering from poverty, illness and oppression.

The Case of Gori Pir

The organisation invented by Sidi *fakirs* ended abruptly when the *dargah* came under state control in the middle of the 1970s. During my fieldwork in the second half of the following decade, I often listened to heated conversations about the trouble that had started after officers of the 'Charity Commission' began to control *dargah* affairs. One of the most eloquent Sidi villagers, who often talked about these events and the changes they had brought about, was the late Kamar Badshah. He was then about fifty years old and lived with his mother, his wife and five unmarried sons in a small mud house in the village. His grandfather had been a great performer of devotional music (*qawwali*) from whom Kamar Badshah, himself a famous local singer, said he learned the craft. On Thursdays, when he sang at the *dargah*, he attracted large audiences. According to Kamar Badshah's view, events at the shrine had come about in the following way (interview March 1987):

It all started with a complaint by C. some eight years ago (c. 1979). C. came to Gori Pir *dada* only a short while before. Once he gave a big donation for putting tiles in front of the tomb. Somehow this was not done and he thought that the three *mujavar* had pocketed the money. He filed a case with the Charity Commissioner saying that at the *dargah* of Gori Pir religious donations are wasted. The office people checked and asked for the books. But there were no written accounts. None of the three *mujavar* could read and write and none of them had thought it important. Their minds were different. So the Charity Commissioner's office dismissed the three *mujavar*. After some time, the new trust with YB Badshah and two Bohra people was established. Since then, Sidi people have lots of trouble.

Actually, state intervention had already begun in the 1950s, when the *fakirs* designated as shrine custodian (*mujavar*) had been officially registered as 'trust members' according to the rules of the Bombay Religious Endowment Act of 1951, which in Gujarat also included Muslim religious institutions. These rules were administered by the

Office of the Charity Commission. Three men with their women shared the routines of serving the shrine. The routine was based on weekly rotation, i.e. each *fakir* would be in charge of the shrine one out of three weeks. With them, other Sidi from the village went to the *dargah* as well, helping with rituals and other kinds of work. Some simply sat and begged. None of the *fakirs* was literate nor were any aware of the laws concerning religious endowments. Thus, they failed to keep accounts. Still, Sidi *fakirs* managed to remain on their own for many years.

Things changed when a follower had launched his public complaint. The old custodians of the shrine were removed by the Charity Commission's Office and a new trust was installed. The new trust had three members, one Sidi and two non-Sidi Muslims. The executive trustee was a man from the Sunni Bohra community which represents in this part of Gujarat a numerically dominant Muslim *jamat* whose members are involved in agriculture as well as in trade.¹⁰ The Bohra trustees were literate and had good connections to influential people in and through their own *jamat*. The only Sidi trustee was YB, a member of the line of the former ritual headman. Moreover, he was also related as a mother's brother to Kamar Badshah (MZS). Since the laws governing charitable religious institutions recognise the right of patrilineal succession, YB's claim to trust membership was accepted while Kamar's—which was based on maternal and female ties—was rejected. YB was about ten years younger than Kamar, father of seven girls and four boys, and had married twice. While his first wife was a Sidi, the second wife came from the same *jamat* as the new trustees, i.e. from the Bohra community. YB's double alliance with Bohras—through common trust membership and by marriage—strengthened the trust and led to popularising the *dargah* specifically amongst members of this community. Under the new trust the accidental, pragmatic and loose organisation of the *dargah* was transformed into a regular pattern of control over people, rituals and trade.

When I met Kamar Badshah, he had already begun to contest the legitimacy of the new trust. He was particularly critical of the close alliance between his maternal brother and the richer and more influential Bohra *jamat*. In his view, YB was 'selling off' his own poor community for personal advantages. An immediate consequence of the establishment of the new trust was the exclusion of the majority

of Sidi from *dargah* affairs. YB Badshah, on behalf of the trust, exercised control by allowing those Sidi who were not members of the trust to perform music or rituals or simply sit and beg for alms, and by preventing others from these acts. Those who performed *qawwali* on Thursdays, like Kamar Badshah, or sold tea to visitors, like several other young men, now needed permission and even had to pay a fee in case it was granted. Correspondingly, the ritual routine of the shrine was also changed, especially dancing (*goma*) was much reduced. Sidi ritual practices were made more and more marginal. In this situation, Kamar began to act as a spokesman for people who felt dispossessed from their former rights. People resented specifically the particularisation of rights over the shrine. Kamar invoked narratives which should remind the rest of the Sidi of the order of past, when each and every Sidi had received the right from the ritual headman to perform rituals and to take a share of the offerings made at the shrine. The present headman, YB Badshah, was blamed for not respecting norms regarding the moral duty of a Sidi headman. He was accused of neglecting his duty towards his own community and of misusing powers to further his and his family's personal interests.

Since the shrine represents the largest and most sacred place for Sidi living all over Gujarat, many people shared Kamar Badshah's opposition to YB and the trust and supported his assertion that the *dargah* was a kind of corporate moral property of the Sidi. They agreed in blaming YB Badshah for siding with non-Sidi and forgetting his responsibilities to his own community. On behalf of this faction, Kamar filed a case in court against the trust and the decision taken by the Charity Commission's Office. In the early 1980s, the first of many more petitions to come, read as follows:

To the Court of the Honourable Joint Charity Commissioner,

The (...) site of the trust belongs rightfully to the Sidi *jamat*. We were given villages from the state of Rajpipla. The Sidi had been given agricultural land as royal gifts (*inam*). It was then that the *dargah* has been registered as a public trust. The rules for the appointment of trustees are based upon the customs handed down from generations after generations in which way the right to be appointed as a trustee also has been handed down. Our people had followed this rule faithfully. Those of us who were not entitled to custodianship (*mujavari*) still helped with the work at the *dargah* and took active part in all our rituals. This arrangement has been discontinued and the people of our caste (*jati*) are made to feel unwanted in the management of the trust.

Instead, the entire management of the trust should be placed in the hands of the Sidi *jamat*. The present trustees have not been selected according to the right principles. They do not perform the traditional worship of the *dargah*. This *dargah* is visited not only by Muslims, but by Hindus, Adivasis and Parsis too. They all expect the fulfilment of their desires. If we cannot treat them correctly in our rituals, they will not be happy and so stop coming. Muslims do not know our rituals. Muslims do not do any other form of worship except their own and pray to no one except Allah. We, the people of the Sidi *jamat*, are quite different from them. Since many years we have been praying at this *dargah* according to our own rules. Moreover, our rituals can be said to resemble those that are performed in many Hindu castes. Therefore, it is not proper to allow any outside Muslim to manage the trust.

The claim to privileged customary rights of the Sidi *jamat* was contested by the trustees by pointing out their long-standing relationship to the *dargah* as followers of the Sidi *pir*:

To the Court of the Honourable Joint Charity Commissioner,

We will remain in the above mentioned trust. This fact is acknowledged by the [Sidi] trustee. Moreover, we have a right to trust membership because since the time of our forefathers we have always believed in Hazrat Gori Pir Saheb. We are originally from [...] district. We are going to the *dargah* with sincere faith since a countless number of years. And we have also previously helped to administer the *dargah* of Ma [Mai Mishra]. It is our duty to act as executors of the trust.

The arguments put forward by both sides evoked different frameworks of legitimacy: Kamar Badshah defined Sidi claims in terms of caste privileges (*jati* for *jamat*), denying—on this level—loyalty to the concept of the universal Muslim *umma*. Rather, plural following and resemblances with Hindu practices were emphasised. The latter statement shows ambiguity—it could be understood as a superficial surrender to hegemonising and encompassing claims made by the majority community; or, the tendency to classify Sidi practices with Hindu practices might also be read as a defiance of Muslim reform preachers whose critique of shrine worship was rejected by many Sidi. For Kamar Badshah, the very practices that are defined as ‘un-Islamic’ by fundamentalist reformers represent the proof for his own Islamic/Muslim piety. The statement could thus also refer to a partial identification with the larger religious community. The ambivalence thus results from two different tendencies (creolised practices of shrine worship vs. pure Islam) which determine the religious debate within

the Muslim community in general. Kamar Badshah felt a Muslim in terms of a shared culture, but refused to identify with a position which aims at the exclusion of Sidi practices. Since Kamar Badshah was well aware that outsider Muslims, i.e. Muslims unrelated to the cult of Gori Pir, criticised Sidi practices as 'backward' and 'superstitious,' he also thought it likely that the influence of other Muslims in the trust would marginalise Sidi rituals. These were by definition transgressive and not easily confined to the categories 'Muslim' and 'Islam'.

The trustees, on the other hand, justified their claim by referring to a universal faith, a long history of visiting and venerating the shrine and to their fulfilment of religious duties. In their opinion, non-Sidi Muslim followers could claim the same rights as Sidi on the basis of their being devoted to the saints. They also thought themselves better suited to administer the shrine because of the Sidi's 'backwardness,' that is poverty, illiteracy, and low level of education, and 'superstitious practices.' However, they still cared for Sidi approval of their positions, which was granted by YB in his acceptance of their membership in the trust. YB argued in favour of 'progress' (*agal*). He shared the other trustee's point of view that an exclusive Sidi organisation would not be capable to bring about the necessary development of the shrine. Without the support and the knowledge of educated people, YB claimed, Gori Pir could not grow. Also, he refuted the accusation raised against him, that he would marginalise other Sidi, by pointing out that individual Sidi were employed as ritual specialists as before, but they now received a monthly salary.

In the course of time, the people of the village became divided over the issue of whether to accept YB and the trust or whether to resist and oppose him. Many were convinced that Gori Pir and the other *pirs* needed a special ritual treatment which only Sidi people knew how to perform, but they also had to admit that all these rituals were in fact performed by Sidi employed by the trust. Those who were employed by the trust supported YB. Others followed the lead of Kamar Badshah who publicly denied the legitimacy of the trust. In the early years of the lawsuit, supportive households contributed financially to the costs for a lawyer hired by Kamar Badshah. However, after some time, when petitions were not successful, they lost interest and would show more pragmatic attitudes. People would sometimes agree with Kamar Badshah and criticise the behaviour of

YB, at other times they would see it the other way round and accept a favour from the latter. Initially Kamar Badshah was supported by the majority of the Sidi in the village; after a while, however, most households of the opposition faction felt that their efforts were in vain and lost interest. In spite of this, Kamar Badshah continued his legal efforts until his death. The 'case' is still pending today—unresolved, like millions of other litigations concerning disputes of succession at *dargahs*.

In 2000, YB was still a member of the trust, sharing responsibility for the management of the shrine with the son of the first Bohra executive trustee. Moreover, the daily routine of the *dargah* continues to be dependent on the work of Sidi families. A few Sidi men are employed by the trust to perform ritual services (*lobanbatti*) and other work at the *dargah*. Their wives fulfill ritual services on demand of female believers; during festivals they help with cooking. The eldest son of YB Badshah completed seven years of schooling. He then became a kind of ritual apprentice learning the craft of serving Gori Pir. He was taught by his mother's father (*nana*) who happened to be one of the salaried *mujavar*. One day, he will assume the position of *gaddivaras*. YB's wife and daughters look after the *dargah* of Mai Mishra.

Those Sidi from the village who were not employed by the trust found other possibilities for participating at least marginally in the development of the *dargah*. One option consisted in discovering a new tomb of a forgotten *pir* on the plot of land one owned. At least two families, one of them Kamar Badshah's, discovered a tomb on their land which they then turned into a small *dargah*, hoping that *goripirvale* on their way to the shrine would stop by and pay their respects to the new saints. Other Sidi turned to doing business at the shrine. In the 1990s, YB and the trust have organised the commercial features of the shrine in such a way that Sidi from the village could be included. Most of them have received a permit to run a business in the surroundings of the tombs. Several houses in the village now maintain a permanent or temporary shop or tea stall on the way to the shrine. A small shrine *bazar* has emerged where tea, snacks, rose petals and other ritual paraphernalia are sold to the several hundred visitors who presently visit the shrine on Thursdays (ritual day for venerating Muslim saints) and, increasingly, on Sundays (office holiday).

The Defeat of Plurality

While Kamar Badshah filed his case, YB and the trust were busily developing the shrine according to their own notions. In the course of time, the shrine of Gori Pir was transformed from a sacred site allowing people of diverse religious backgrounds to find meaning in the Pir into a more exclusively Islamic site designed for the religious needs of Muslim believers. Paradoxically, the practical defeat of the particularistic position put forward by Kamar Badshah (Sidi rituals, exclusive control by Sidi *jamat*) by the more universal position (Islamic faith, independent of *jamat*) resulted in the widening of the social gap between Hindus and Muslims and in the further extrapolation of boundaries. What seemingly started as a purely local conflict over the control of a *dargah* progressively turned into a process fuelled by and paralleling the political developments of the time, i.e. the increasing polarisation of Muslims and non-Muslims.

This process has become visible in the changes of the spatial arrangement of tombs. In 1983, when I saw the *dargah* for the first time, the spatial pattern reflected the relationships between tombs as determined by the relative position the saints were accorded to each other. The three shrines of the Sidi saints (Gori Pir, Mai Mishra and Bava Habash) differed slightly but significantly in size and structure. Each consisted of a decorated tomb sheltered by a wooden or iron structure. The congregational space surrounding the tombs was in the open and shadowed by trees. The shrine of Gori Pir, the eldest male *pir*, was slightly bigger than the one of Mai Mishra who in turn superseded that of Bava Habash. Instead of individual accomplishment, the relationships and interdependencies between the female and male saints were visually stressed. The relative standing of the individual *pir* was defined by referring to categories of seniority (elder/younger) and gender (male/female). Accordingly, the tomb of the elder brother (Gori Pir) was built slightly bigger than that of the younger brother (Bava Habash). The tombs of the elder brother and the sister (Gori Pir, Mai Mishra) were arranged next to each other on the same hill, thus signifying the instrumental importance of female power for the activation of male power.

In the year 2000, by contrast, the tomb of Gori Pir far superseded the size of the other two. While nothing much had changed at the tomb of Bava Habash, which is still roofless and sheltered by a tree, the

shrine of Mai Mishra had also been expanded and embellished, although it remains significantly smaller than the tomb of Gori Pir. The 'burial place' of Gori Pir now definitely marks the central, most sacred person and place of the dargah. The tomb is made of costly marble and is surrounded by a larger, roofed hall topped by a dome and minarets. At one side, a small mosque for men congregating for prayers had been built in 1981. By the middle of the next decade, the mosque had expanded considerably.

Less obvious changes could be noticed in the use of sacred spaces of the tomb and their symbolic decorations. Formerly, objects symbolizing the hopes of believers (for example, a small wooden cradle for the wish of a child, particularly a son) were put on top of the tomb; these were now replaced by the Qur'an, pictures from Mecca and a silver moon. In correspondence to the protruding presence of the single male saint, men had now privileged access to the tomb. Thus, women were excluded. Where formerly men and women could sit close to the tomb of Gori Pir and touch or even kiss it, a wooden frame now separates the tomb from female believers and the open space of the hall. A small passage is left through which men may pass to touch and kiss the tomb, while women are forbidden such acts.

This was one of the practices which were newly introduced at the end of the 1980s. Since women at most Sufi shrines in North India are expected to keep a greater distance from the tomb than men, it was one of the critical steps whereby the ritual routine of the *dargah* of Gori Pir was changed to better conform to the mainstream Sufi pattern. According to Muslim orthopraxis, women may not touch a male Pir's tomb because of their bodily impurity caused by menstruation. For similar reasons, Muslim women in India do not visit mosques.

The burial practices also changed the face of Gori Pir. To be buried near or inside the shrine compound had previously been a privilege confined to the Sidi which they occasionally granted to a devout follower of the *dargah*. There is, for example, the tomb of a Parsi woman follower of Bava Habash. She wished to be buried close to her Pir which had been granted by the then Sidi *mujavar*. Other tombs scattered in the vicinity of the main shrines belong to Sidi *fakirs* of the past. Since the last 15 to 20 years, however, no Sidi was given permission to be buried in the shrine compound. Instead, one now

finds the tomb of the first Bohra trustee who had passed away a few years ago and was then succeeded by his son. In addition, a more gorgeous shrine with an onion shaped dome had recently (1993) been built for another follower of the shrine referred to as Sayyid Bapu. Sayyid Bapu had been venerated during his life as a charismatic spiritual leader by his own followers, who, after his death, found the shrine of Gori Pir a convenient site for establishing a new *dargah*. Sayyid Bapu himself, as well as his followers, maintained close contact with the trust and donated large sums of money. The members of the trust welcomed the establishment of a *dargah* of a Sayyid whose patronym carries more prestige than the name Sidi. Moreover, the new tomb presented the *dargah* of Gori Pir with an additional large number of lay followers, i.e. those of the Sayyid Bapu.

Thus, the spatial development of the shrine reflects the religious aspirations of the trust members and the new followers of the shrine. Over the years, the number of urban Bohras who visit and patronise the shrine of Gori Pir has steadily grown. In recent years, they far superseded any other group of followers. In the big cities of Ahmedabad and Baroda, commercial pilgrim tours were organised covering five shrines in Gujarat, one of which was Gori Pir. Already in the late 1980s, organised bus tours carried loads of potential new followers to the shrine. Extended families organised joint trips in trucks. Thanks to word of mouth propaganda amongst shrine pilgrims, urban neighbours and groups of relatives the popularity of the shrine has steadily grown amongst both urban and rural Muslims. Many of the visitors belong to an upwardly mobile stratum of the Muslim lower middle class. For these people, Gori Pir is a powerful Muslim—not Sidi—*pir* worthy of charitable investment.

As a consequence, the outer appearance of the shrine nowadays reflects predominantly the aesthetic and religious attitudes of an upwardly mobile Muslim population. The former 'shrine in the wilderness' resembles today any Muslim shrine of medium size and prestige in an urban environment. The same architectural materials (cement), colours (green, red), styles and embellishments (dome, minaret) are used. And, like other popular shrines, the *dargah* of Gori Pir corresponds to a pattern in which a single saint stands at the centre preceding his lower level companions/followers. Moreover, renovations include new facilities that cater to the needs of an urban, mod-

ern clientele. In addition to electricity and water facilities, a steep road has been built almost up to the top of the hill. Moreover, there is a new concrete bungalow consisting of five rooms which long-term visitors may hire. They even have latrines and cabins for bathing.

As a result of these modernising and Islamising efforts implemented by the trust, the spatial pattern of the shrine compound now communicates a different message to believers than before. Adjusting the cult to the dominant pattern of Sufi cults, Gori Pir is being represented more definitely as an Islamic saint. His sister may be important for women's concerns, but she cannot compete in spiritual power with the central *pir*. Parallel to the gradual shifts in the images of the Sidi *pir* that appear objectified in the size and look of their respective tombs, the numbers of followers who are poor and belong to Hindu and Bhil categories have declined considerably. The presence of the cult patrons of the past is less visible now that members of the rising Muslim middle classes have become followers of the *dargah* of Gori Pir in increasing numbers. The spatial transformations of the *dargah* mirror the social process through which the mixing of people of different religious affiliations has been substituted by a more homogenous cult clientele.

The growing popularity of the Gori Pir *dargah* amongst Bohra and other Muslims may be explained by a variety of factors. First of all, the shrine, which formerly had been remote and difficult to reach, now has come closer by the building of roads and the increase in traffic. It is not necessary any more to cover the last five kilometres from the railway station in the *taluka* town to the *dargah* of Gori Pir by foot. The shrine has come within comparatively easy reach from the major towns of Surat, Bharuch, Baroda and even Ahmedabad. Many of the new followers live in one of these cities and belong to an emerging Muslim middle class where members are not yet highly educated but make money through business or by migrating to the Gulf. Members of upwardly mobile sections of the Muslim community typically invest in religious institutions in order to voice a claim to higher status within their own *jamat* and accumulate religious merit at the same time. Within the category of the Bohra, for example, status competition between different segments is fuelled by the increase in economic wealth that transformed formerly poor sections of Sunni Bohras into groups aspiring to status mobility. Connections to the trust and act-

ing as generous patrons and donors of the *dargah* appear to be one strategy followed by Bohra and other Muslims. In turn, the shrine gained even wider popularity in urban centres.

Another strategy consists in adhering to the Muslim reform movement led by the Tablighi Jamat (Pandor 1993a & 1993b). At the same time at which Hindutva ideology gained ground amongst Hindus in Gujarat, Islamic reform movements such as the Tablighi Jamat gained ground among Muslims. Fuelled by opposition to Hindu nationalist activities, this organisation runs several Quranic schools (*madrasa*) in towns and villages. While the teachings of the Tablighi Jamat used to advocate a return to 'pure' forms of Islam as well as abstinence from venerating Muslim saints (van der Veer 1992), the opposition between universal and local forms of Islam seems to have softened in recent years. The Tablighi Jamat came to accept shrines if they reformed their ritual schedules according to Islamic prescriptions. After the destruction of several *dargahs* in Ahmedabad and other places by Hindus in the 1980s, the Tablighi Jamat supported Muslim sites of worship under the condition that they would Islamise their customs. Since then, the arm of this organisation also reaches to the shrine of Gori Pir. One of YB's sons was sent to a nearby rural town to study the Quran in a *madrasa* run by the Tablighi Jamat. Due to his influence the shrine routine is now built around the five daily prayers (*namaz*).¹¹

Over the years, Sidi rituals were more and more pushed into the background in favour of demonstrations of normative Islamic piety. The start of the annual saint's day celebrations (*urs*), for example, does not follow Sidi ritual rules any longer. The ritual of 'drinking black and white *kavo*' which used to mark the beginning of the ritual time has been replaced by the reading of the first chapter of the Koran (*fatiha*) by groups of Muslim lay followers. Moreover, many of them now look upon the major ritual acts of the past with scorn and suspicion; possession rituals and Sidi dancing (*goma*, *dammal*) have become particularly suspect in the eyes of many Muslim followers. Trance, possession and night-long drumming sessions (*dammal*) are not included in definitions of proper Islamic actions. The Sidi still dance when celebrating the *urs* of Gori Pir, but they do so for much shorter periods and with less vigour. *Dammal*, which used to be the major ritual event—and which it still is at other Sidi shrines—at the *dargah* of Gori Pir has been reduced to a 'by-programme' of the

'main' ritual schedule determined by prayer times, reading the Qur'an and venerating the saints by carrying their flags in a ritual procession. The devaluation of possession as 'backward' in the wake of the marginalisation of Sidi rituals also affected the cult clientele. Thus, the number of Hindus and Bhils visiting the shrine has steadily declined.

For many years, Kamar Badshah was to fight this trend. He, like many people of this class, was opposed to purifying Muslim reform movements. Against the authority of the scriptures he defended the belief in the power of *pirs* and in the rituals by which they should be venerated. According to this view, Sidi practices and Islam were not seen as contradictory, constitutive of mutual exclusion. Rather, he defined himself a Muslim by referring to the very practices that reformists declared as 'un-Islamic.' Kamar never became tired of stating his opinion. *Qawwali* were an important means for him to give voice to another perspective that ran counter to the dominant discourse of Islamic reform and modernisation.

Even though the trust at one time had tried to prevent Kamar Badshah from singing *qawwali* at the *dargah*, he had successfully asserted himself. Until well into the last decade, Kamar Badshah used to perform *qawwali* on Thursdays. In this endeavour he was supported by other musicians. Kamar's *qawwali* group consisted of his sons and Prakash, the 'harmonium-walla,' as he was called, a Hindu from a caste of fishermen from a nearby village. He accompanied Kamar Badshah, who also played a drum, on his harmonium. Neither Kamar Badshah nor Prakash considered belonging to different religious communities to be of any importance. What brought them together was their mutual interest in making music and singing. Both professed respect for the faith of the other, as became manifest by Kamar Badshah singing Hindu devotional songs (*bhajan*) occasionally and Prakash singing Sufi devotional songs (*qawwali*) sometimes. Their repertoire included famous songs of both musical traditions. One of the most ardent visitors to the shrine was a poet from a nearby town who wrote the texts of many of the *qawwali* songs in Urdu which Kamar Badshah sang to the tunes of popular Bollywood movie hits. These songs spoke of the Sidi *pir* having brought the light of Islam to the people, of their taking away all sorrows from those who sought their help, and of their welcoming every person who approached them

with an honest heart, no matter what his/her caste, creed or colour of skin may be. Kamar had many fans; in addition, many of the old cult clientele were critical of the changing face of the *dargah*. While YB concentrated upon hosting the new lay followers at the *dargah*, especially Bohras, Kamar Badshah's house became a centre for the old cult clientele who were progressively pushed to the background. Followers living in Mumbai would stay in his house, while others came from the nearby towns and villages for a visit. They respected Kamar Badshah and supported his struggle. Many of the old clientele—not only Muslims, but Hindus and Bhils as well—were ardent admirers of Kamar Badshah's *qawwali* performances. Over the years, his house became the centre for the increasingly marginalised old cult clientele.

The year 1992 proved to be traumatic for the believers of Gori Pir and the Sidi. For the first time, a Hindu mob had gathered to attack the 'Muslim place.' The majority of Sidi lived in one of the towns and cities in Gujarat, as, for example in Jamnagar or in Baroda, where they had experienced violent clashes with Hindu neighbours since the previous decade; the village and the shrine of Gori Pir, however, had never been attacked before. During the all-India riots following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the shrine of Gori Pir was targeted for the first time. While the Sidi and the people at the shrine could avert a bloody confrontation, people were shocked to find Hindus who had formerly been shrine followers amongst the attackers.

Conclusion

Contemporary political developments in Gujarat have entered local religious discourses by stressing communal difference and thereby impinging upon the context for individual and collective actions. In this paper I have explored the changing socio-religious reality of a regional *dargah* in Gujarat. From the history of this Sidi group in Gujarat, whose forefathers probably reached Gujarat between the late 18th to the early 20th century either as slaves, as freed slaves or as former seamen who stayed back one may assume that the cult is only about one hundred fifty years old.¹² Its growth in the region testifies to a vital process typical for Indian religiosity in general, i.e. the constant invention of new religious movements or cults throughout colonial and postcolonial times, which were initiated and propa-

gated not only by educated reformers, but also by charismatic people of the lower social classes.¹³ Since the 19th century, this *dargah* had become a major place for the spatial rooting of constructions of identity (in tombs of Sidi *pirs*) for displaced Africans in Gujarat. As a place of worship of the lower social classes, it was as removed from political power centres as from dominant religious norms. The new subculture which had emerged at the shrine of Gori Pir was the result of Sidi acculturation in Gujarat. Africans in Gujarat acculturated themselves by picking up and reinterpreting diverse beliefs and ideas not only from one dominant group (Muslims) but from their neighbours and masters who happened to belong to different communities (Bhils, Hindus, Parsis). As a result, a new religious pattern was created which did not synthesise different religious conceptions into a new syncretic or 'hybrid' form, but rather allowed for the accommodation of difference expressed in a common symbolic language. While this pattern emerged over time through actions from below, it was transformed when the shrine came into the range of state control, pressures of modernisation and targeting practices of 'backwardness.'

As a result, the *dargah* became a site for re-defining and re-adjusting boundaries. This process paralleled progressive religious polarisation of Hindus and Muslims brought about by religious nationalisms (van der Veer 1994). In postcolonial religious nationalisms, territory represents a central issue in defining boundaries between religious communities. Hindu and Muslim religious nationalists compete for symbolic spaces (temples and shrines) as markers of their respective identities. Processions serve to delineate religious territories and to affirm one's public presence. In the case dealt with, however, different sections of Muslims competed for control over the religious space of the *dargah*. The shifting images of the topography of the *dargah* also reflect the needs of upwardly mobile Muslims for new sacred places to invest in, in order to communicate Islamic piety, wealth, and influence as the basis for claims to higher social prestige. Territorial space is thus equally as important for the construction of internal unity of the minority community as it is in regard to drawing a boundary with respect to another religious community.

My aim in this paper has not been to focus upon people and institutions who actively participate in violent discourses of communalism (or instigate them),¹⁴ but upon the distant echoes which these

might have in local contexts of the lower classes. The *dargah* of Gori Pir provides an example of the specificity of local low class inventions and how they are not always able to resist outside pressures. Shrines and cults may be appropriated by groups and people higher on the social scale for a variety of reasons, as has happened at the shrine of Gori Pir. A former site of resistance is thereby turned into a site for enacting communalisation.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. In administrative language, Adivasi are termed 'Scheduled Tribes.' For a critique of the evolutionist and derogatory connotations of the term 'tribe', cf. Hardiman (1987: 14ff.). I shall use the term Adivasi when referring to populations of Indian aborigines who differ in many respects, especially in regard to social organisation, from caste society. Adivasi social organisations are typically more egalitarian and build a contrast to hierarchical constructions of caste. The term *jamat* is used by Muslims in Gujarat for denoting either a caste or sectarian category.
2. For the African origin of this instrument, cf. Catlin (2002).
3. The term 'jhikkar' is derived from the Sufi term for chanting the name of God, *zhikr*. Sidi *jhikkar* are songs of praise in the name of the ancestral *pirs*.
4. *Goma* or *dammal* are names for Sidi possession dances, cf. Basu (1995; 2001).
5. Cf. also Gaborieau (1986) for the integrative practices of *sadhus* and *fakirs*.
6. While the position of the ritual headman called *gaddivaras* is deemed to be the most prestigious, the leader of Sidi rituals and dancing, the *nagarchi*, also claimed high esteem among *fakirs*. Next came the *vacir* who organised the initiation of new *fakirs* into the Sidi order. Subordinate positions to these three are accorded to *kotwal* and *nissandar*. The duty of the *kotwal* included carrying water to the *dargah* and performing the rituals of ordeal. The *nissandar* carried the emblematic flag of the Sidi *fakir* order at the annual *urs* celebrations.
7. The Sidi assembly of ancestors in a way archives the history of Africans in India, which has seen many powerful military commanders.
8. In spite of the saints being categorised as Sidi ancestors, however, no spiritual genealogy, *silsila*, is constructed that would connect present day

people with the founders of the cult. Instead, a connection is established by classification. The category 'Sidi' is marked by spatial and phenotypical referents, such as Africa as the place of origin and curly hair as the bodily marker of Sidi spiritual powers.

9. For an Adivasi reform movement against the belief in witches, cf. Hardiman (1986: 38ff.). Many Bhil women accused of witchcraft were still brought to the shrine of Gori Pir in the late 1980s.
10. The category 'Bohra' includes several social and religious strands. The Daudi Ismaili Vohra represent a Shia branch, while Patel Bohras follow the Sunni tradition of Islam in Gujarat. At the *dargah* of Gori Pir, mostly the latter are involved. Sunni Bohras form a very large caste in South Gujarat that includes peasants and traders, rural subcastes and urban subcastes (cf. Lambert 1976).
11. Formerly, prayer times (*namaz*) were only kept on Friday noon; *qawwali* and other activities were interrupted on Thursdays at the time for midday-prayers as well, but *namaz* was not performed jointly. Today, YB's son uses loudspeakers to call for prayer five times a day.
12. Since African slaves have a long history in India, it is sometimes assumed that contemporary Sidi are connected in continuous genealogy to historical Habshi. However, a closer look at the history of Habshi/Sidi in India shows that they were situated in different historical situations which not always favoured the formation of a specific ethnic/social identity (Basu 2001). Moreover, what the personal memories of contemporary Sidi in Gujarat also show is that many of their predecessors came as late as the 20th century. For the history of these Sidi as 'crossers of the sea,' cf. (Ewalds 2000). From documents as well as from Sidi narratives it can be fairly assumed that the cult of Gori Pir has been invented by displaced Africans in rather recent times.
13. A recent example is the growing popularity of the worship of Trimurthi in Bengal and Orissa amongst rickshaw pullers. For a reform movement amongst Adivasi, cf. Hardiman (1986).
14. For details on these aspects, cf. Nandy et al. (1995: 110ff).

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Per/forming African Identities Sidi Communities in the Transnational Moment

Prita Sandy Meier

Within the diverse practices of Islamic religious culture in India, communities of African Indians who call themselves Sidis have gained attention among scholars for their local model of Sufism, in which their authority as religious specialists is articulated within the context of their identities as Muslims of African descent. This paper, researched from the perspective of an Africanist, focuses on the Sidi utilisation of their African ancestry as a primary social and cultural resource by which Sidi communities in India have shaped their identities and mediated the politics of the nation-state of India. Here I will explore the intersection of local and global agendas as they are played out within the social space of a specific religious shrine and its neighbouring village.

My observations are based on research conducted in India during the summer of 2000 as a member of the University of Iowa Ford Foundation-sponsored Crossing Borders Programme.¹ Central to the objectives of Crossing Borders are interdisciplinary dialogue and an active partnership among professors and graduate students during fieldwork projects. During this particular project we visited communities of Afro-Indians living in Gujarat and Mumbai. I will focus on the Sidi community near Gori Pir village in the state of Gujarat and a shrine complex located there, which is central to the religious and social lives of Sidis in Gujarat and beyond. Furthermore, I draw upon the work of anthropologist Helene Basu to situate my observations within the larger context of South Asian cultural studies. Basu's ground-breaking research, which focuses on the religious practices of

Sidis, introduced Sidis of Gori Pir village to an academic community searching for instances of contemporary African memory and identity in the Indian Ocean world.²

In fact, the interrelationship between scholarly knowledge production and its subject, in this case the experiences of Sidi peoples, serves as a springboard to examine how local, national and international perspectives shape and inflect each other through global networks of cross-cultural exchange. The politics and processes making local Sidi concerns and perspectives meaningful to academic audiences through current discourses about global diasporas and identity constructions have been key to shaping my own academic interests and therefore I emphasise this aspect of my experiences in India. In turn I will highlight how the Sidi community of Gori Pir village has accessed the interests of international visiting scholars and national governmental officials for their own strategies to improve their lives locally.

Recent academic discussions about the impact of globalisation have emphasised the seeming dichotomies and tensions between the local and the global. Yet the interactions between diverse peoples taking place at the shrine of Gori Pir illustrate how local cultures adapt, appropriate and rework global phenomena. Rather than conceiving the relationship between the local and global as conflicted, I want to emphasise the dialectical relationship between them. How local agencies and situations mediate the global, transforming global rhetoric and phenomena to service specific locations are themes taken up by recent publications going beyond past binary studies focusing on the seemingly overpowering homogenising effect of globalisation on regional experiences (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997). From this perspective a more nuanced understanding of how the global is accessed by negotiating local histories and cultural traditions in the context of Gori Pir Hill is brought to the fore.

The social space of Sidis in India is dependent on long established notions of hierarchy derived from Islamic, Hindu and other regional traditions and their engagement with international concerns is calibrated by the constraints, opportunities, demands, and experiences of daily life in Gori Pir village. As descendants of Africans their ethnic affiliation was constructed into a ritual identity as *faqirs* within the Islamic Sufi tradition. As *faqirs*, or religious specialists, the Sidis are

seen as intermediaries and carriers of *baraka*, divine essence or charisma, which is derived from their patron saint Gori Pir and an assembly of other saints who are conceived of as his brothers and sisters. The shrine complex at Gori Pir Hill in Gujarat is considered the tomb of Gori Pir and therefore the most important site of pilgrimage for his devotees. According to Sidi oral history today, Gori Pir was an Ethiopian military commander and Sufi who was sent to India by Prophet Mohammed to squelch the destructive forces of a demoness. It is important to note quickly that there are multiple histories, some oral, some in written form, surrounding Gori Pir. In another version, he was a prosperous businessman who came from Kano, Nigeria via Sudan and Mecca to Gujarat to develop a local economy based on the mining, processing and trade in semi-precious stones (Lodhi 1992: 84).

Within the idiom of Sufi orders, Sidis inherit the *baraka* directly from Gori Pir and his siblings, Mai Mishra and Bava Habash. Gori Pir and his siblings are considered the founders of the Sidi lineage and thus spiritual and historic kinship ties unite Sidis and in turn connect them to the divine. Sidis, like other Indian Muslims and Hindus, are also categorised within a caste system. Their ritual and ethnic identity as Sidi also describes their membership in a *jamat* or caste (Basu 1995: 52). In the context of Indo-Muslim society, there is a close correspondence between the ranking of Muslim groups or castes and the hierarchy of Sufi orders. The Sidi community living adjacent to Gori Pir Hill has been categorised as a low Muslim caste for several reasons and their low status today is also associated with their role as slaves in the past. From a historical perspective, Africans in India were not automatically of low status, as they were an integral and important component of aristocratic dynasties, especially in the 15th and 16th centuries (Basu 1993: 291; also see Alpers in this volume). Especially within the administration of the Sultanates, African slaves often reached important leadership roles (Lodhi 1992: 84). Even today there are the so-called royal Sidis, who are the descendants of African admirals and rulers who had ascended to their political stations during the Mughal period. However, in more recent history, African slaves continued to be imported from east Africa as domestic servants well into the 19th century (Basu 1995: 43–46).

There was another influx of Africans to India as a result of the rise of Great Britain as a colonial power in the Indian Ocean. After a

treaty in 1845 between the Sultan of Oman and the British outlawed the trade in slaves, any ships intercepted by the British Navy carrying slaves from east Africa were confiscated by the British and the Africans found aboard officially freed. Rather than being returned to their homelands, they were often left to fend for themselves in Bombay or Surat where they were transported en masse by the British Navy. As Basu has documented, some of the older Sidis living in Gujarat are only second-generation arrivals and still remember stories from their parents' generation about being forced on to ships in Zanzibar (Basu 1995: 46). Basu argues that the Gujarat shrine of Gori Pir in fact served as a space allowing this influx of Africans to assimilate into Indian society (Basu 1993: 293, and 1995: 53).

The low status of Sidis in the symbolic, religious and social sphere is mirrored in their economic and political marginalisation. Members of Sidi communities continue to struggle for economic and social empowerment and scholars who have studied their socio-economic status note Sidis today live in both urban slums and rural underdeveloped areas. Thus as a marginalised group living within contemporary India their situation is embedded within the political mechanisms of the nation-state. Governmental publications addressing the problems facing Sidi communities usually explain their inequality as self-imposed, caused by their refusal to adopt modernity (Basu 1995: 54, 60). The same stereotypes used to describe Bhils, the non-Indo-Aryan inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, are used to describe Sidis. According to this rhetoric, their integration into mainstream Indian society has not occurred because their 'traditional' way of life does not encourage social advancement through education.

Colonial ethnographies have promoted the perpetuation of this image of Sidis. Classifications developed by British ethnographers to support the divide and rule policy of the colonial administration described Sidis in Darwinian terms, claiming they were 'primitive' and, like the Bhils, an ancient people frozen in time. This model was adopted in many ways by post-Independence Indian ethnographers. Recent governmental census reports describe Sidi populations as backward, sexually loose, lazy, stubborn and aggressive (cited in Basu 1995: 55–57).

The Sidi community of about twenty families living adjacent to the shrine of Gori Pir also deals with other challenges specific to their

local situation as the most immediate mediators between the saints and devotees. In the past, they had almost solely depended upon their roles as *faqirs* of Gori Pir for their livelihood as the donations and natural products given to the saints were redistributed to the local Sidi community. But according to a narration of events by our hosts, the shrine came under state control in 1950. Where before the ritual sphere of village life, which included the managing of the shrine, was left to elders of the community, a trust was established by the State Charity Commissioner that had to report all donations. Since the 1970s, when the Sidi trust was accused of misuse of funds, another, wealthier caste was appointed by the Charity Commissioner to control two of the three positions within the trust. While one or two Sidi families have stood to profit from these new institutions, generally they are finding that their authority is being challenged by other regional groups and governmental policies regarding the management of the shrine (see the chapter by Basu in this volume).

What seems paradoxical is that while on many levels Sidis seem to face new and old agents marginalising them even further in Indian society, the shrine of Gori Pir is growing in popularity both locally and globally. One of the most important services Sidis perform for the devotees and pilgrims at the shrine is their musical and dance performances. These diverse performances can be generally described as celebratory praises of Gori Pir, and depending on their context or function are called *goma* or *dammal*. *Goma* points to an east and central African origin, where the word *ngoma* in Swahili and other Bantu languages refers to a wide range of secular, therapeutic and religious celebrations and performances. *Dammal* relates to Indo-Muslim ritual trance dances, common to other Sufi orders in the region. The mystical joy and therapeutic energy created by these performances is seen to be the special gift of Sidis, which they embody because of their African ancestry (Basu 1995: 9). Sidis consider *goma* dancing a gift they received from their African saintly ancestors and their performances make their continued presence essential to the economic and symbolic transactions taking place at the shrine of Gori Pir.

Recently these performances have also come to the attention of secular audiences both in India and beyond. Sidis have been encouraged to perform their dances as symbols of the diversity of India and as 'survivals' of Africanness. Thus these performances have become

the focal point for various agendas seeking alternately to situate Sidis in the nation-state of India, or to recast their 'diasporic' history as a compelling predecessor to transnational movements characterising the contemporary world. The transnational paths of Sidi histories, which were shaped by international empires over several centuries and connected the Arab world, west and east Africa and Europe to the Indian subcontinent, do seem to mirror the trajectories of our globally connected world. Or perhaps more precisely, we can apprehend and conceptualise such historical networks in transnational and transcontinental terms because our own lives are increasingly defined by these imaginaries.

While, as Crystal Bartolovich has noted, globalisation is a 'hotly disputed concept' (Bartolovich 2000: 127), its impact on Sidi communities has produced interesting intersections of often conflicting agendas and perspectives. However theoretically constructed our definitions of globalisation are, the term does describe a diverse set of phenomena shaping countless aspects of daily life across different locations.³ Generally speaking, globalisation describes the transnational dissemination of new technologies and consumer cultures, the domination of the capitalist market across the world, and the unprecedented movements of populations, constantly creating new diasporas. The ease and speed of our group's access to Gori Pir Hill was also possible because of global networks of communication and travel. Most importantly, our visit was not only aided by technologies of communication, but rather, *idioms* of communication already established by other visitors to Gori Pir Hill made discussions of Sidi 'Africanity' mutually intelligible and acceptable. Of course, what we actually understood was framed by our own cultures and training and gives rise to questions of translation.

In theorising about the effects of contemporary globalisation, Arjun Appadurai has suggested that 'The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of centre-periphery models...' (Appadurai 1990: 6). How does the Sidi community engage the challenges of the 'collapse of borders' and 'disjunctures' seen as characteristic of contemporary globalisation? How are they negotiating local, national and transnational notions of status, orthodoxy and identity? Does the discourse on globalisation simply act as a

coercive force that appropriates their local realities to serve as a platform for institutional discourse? This paper certainly cannot answer all of these questions; however, these issues are integral to understanding the complexities of contemporary Sidi cultures and the nexus between Sidi concerns and national and scholarly projects currently interested in emphasising 'African' aspects of Sidi identity.⁴

On the national level, governmental officials have sought to utilise Sidis in the service of international relations. The Indian Council of World Affairs published an article in 1986 that urged that the 'policy towards these groups' should include the 'promotion of their cultural activity,' which could lead to improving relations with African countries. The article concludes with the observation that: 'Very few know India also has an African population and they are comfortably accommodated in the national life... Thus, establishing people to people contact between the Indian and African people could open a vista of socio-cultural understanding and strengthen the ties between the two' (Patel 1986: 244). Since national Independence Sidi performances have often been incorporated in official festivals, where they are meant to signal a multicultural sense of nationhood. In this context Sidi culture is adapted to serve a nationalist discourse, promoting 'local difference' as a valuable asset to the modern nation of India. Recently Sidis have also been asked to perform for visiting dignitaries from African countries, including Nelson Mandela, and during state-sponsored events geared towards a secular audience, such as tourists. This reconfiguration of their African identity focuses on the 'authenticity' of their African heritage. In this role they are allowed to perform as entertainers for an audience not aware of the sacred significance of their performances or their roles as religious specialists. Furthermore, in this context their performances promote an ahistorical image of Sidi culture, encapsulating their 'Africanness' without any real reference to their specific lives and histories, which are deeply embedded within local religious and cultural traditions. But reifying histories for emerging markets of cultural consumption is certainly not a phenomenon only experienced by Sidis, and as a new avenue for economic and social mobility, members of Sidi communities have actively participated in reshaping their performance personas. For example, our hosts in Gujarat told us that they have designed 'African' dances and costumes based on performances they

had attended in Mumbai where they saw an internationally touring West African dance troupe.

The recent interest of Africanists in the African diaspora of the Indian Ocean cultural complex has also resulted in Sidi communities hosting students and scholars from abroad who are interested in their Africanness. Certainly, when our group arrived our Sidi hosts were already acquainted with our particular questions and perspectives. While our conversations and interactions touched on many diverse issues and ranged from serious discussions about Sidi cultural and political struggles to light-hearted exchanges over shared meals, the 'agenda' of our group was focused on discerning all things African when we were being consciously 'scholarly' and taking notes. Discussions during the trip with my former advisor, also an Africanist, were interspersed with wonderful conjectures about Sidi material and expressive culture and its relationship to east African traditions. Our hosts were even kind enough to help us along this path of analysis by showing us a photocopy (from a book) of a 19th century engraving of an Ethiopian or Sudanese musician holding the same type of lyre central to the shrine paraphernalia of Gori Pir.⁵ As they explained to us, a dear friend and Western scholar sent this photocopy to them. In retrospect, this simple interaction illuminated intersections between both local and international knowledge production, as the document now serves Sidis of Gori Pir village as authoritative evidence of their history. Furthermore, the understanding of our hosts that this was exactly the sort of thing of interest to us further highlights how the interconnectedness of the 'globalised world' impacts the construction of an African diasporic consciousness or awareness.⁶

Leaders of Sidi communities have of course other concerns. In part, they have been active in mobilising their new visibility in their ongoing struggle for economic and social empowerment. These recent pressures to assert their African ethnicity outside of the context of their role as *faqirs* has caused friction within Sidi communities, with opinions varying on the validity of their African performances in secular contexts, and raising questions about what image Sidis should be projecting nationally and internationally. During group discussions at Gori Pir Hill it became apparent that some members of the Sidi community view such celebrations of their 'Africity' as not their

own heritage. An awareness of how these new strategies might have a distancing effect and act as an obstacle to their efforts to gain more rights and benefits as Indians was also evident. These complex processes of exchange and self-articulation raise interesting questions about the models for understanding modern and historical constructions of identity and agency and the making and definition of diaspora as a concept and condition.

I think central to understanding contemporary experiences of the Sidi as people of African descent is their existence within the nation-state of India. While scholarly pursuits have been focusing on how to think 'transnationally' and to move beyond the limits of the nation-state as a concept, as a condition diaspora is deeply linked to local societal and national hierarchies. Tiffany Patterson and Robin Kelley note, 'the African diaspora itself exists within the context of global race and gender hierarchies which are formulated and reconstituted across national boundaries' and also 'along social lines through systems that define and limit access based on race and gender...' (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 20). Drawing on the work of Michael Hanchard, they argue that studies of African diasporas must take into account 'the power of black identities rooted in regional and national understandings' (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 22). From this perspective, focusing on regional constructions of ethnicity and 'blackness' can produce a more nuanced understanding of contemporary Sidi negotiations of their African diaspora identities.

As I have already noted, the ideological systems and historical processes relegating Sidis in Gujarat to a low status in the social sphere continue to emphasise their 'otherness' or 'foreignness' as an explanation for their marginalisation from sources of economic and political power within India. On the other hand, national programmes celebrating the diverse heritage of India have encouraged Sidis to emphasise their 'Africanity,' as such displays of multiculturalism are in part meant to signal the 'maturity' of a state that recognises the civil value of cultural difference. But, as Graham Huggan points out, such multicultural discourse can also 'disguise persistent racial tensions within the nation; and... in affecting a respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference, [it] deflects attention away from social issues—discrimination, unequal access, hierarchies of ethnic privilege...' (Huggan 2001: 126).

In turn, members of Sidi communities negotiate this complex terrain of various perspectives and forces producing both opportunities and obstacles for their own local empowerment. The Sidis of Gori Pir village continue to turn to the cultural sphere, to religion and dance performances, as an avenue to redress inequality. It is important to note that it is during their *goma* performances that Sidis challenge and subvert social hierarchies. Basu has documented the practice of Sidi *goma* performances at shrines of higher ranking Sayyid Muslims where the performance is in part satirical and serves as critical commentary about their high caste hosts. In the words of Basu: 'The whole carnivalesque performance seems designed to bring down the high to a low bodily realm. Through movements and facial grimacing, the hierarchy inscribed upon social bodies is pulled down and its seriousness is laughed at' (Basu 1998: 136). Clearly, the use of performances to assert Sidi authority in the production of their own sense of cultural identity is a topic that deserves greater attention in the future.

Furthermore, while state sponsored celebrations may only be interested in certain displays and discussions of Sidi culture, Sidi leaders certainly try to use their new visibility as platforms to discuss their needs within the nation-state of India. Sidi communities also access and redefine scholarly projects interested in their Africanity as avenues to redress inequalities locally. For example, a young Sidi community leader saw our visit as an opportunity to emphasise the importance of Sidi culture beyond Gujarat and even India to the government by bringing a local politician to meet us at the Gori Pir shrine. He quickly and smartly orchestrated the event as formally as possible, arranging for the exchange of flower garlands and asking us to take pictures with the representative. Clearly, the presence of Western researchers was meant to impart to the government official the growing significance of their community.

Furthermore, out of economic necessity, Sidi families living in the village near Gori Pir Hill have recently been lobbying on the local level to receive the categorisation of 'Scheduled Tribes,' which would further emphasise their 'difference' and align them with negative stereotypes about Bhil communities. But it is their hope to benefit from the economic and educational subsidies this categorisation promises to bring. These efforts also highlight the need of Sidi communities to secure their rights as citizens of India and to define themselves as part of a nation.

As we have seen, it is unproductive and simplistic to categorise the impact of 'outside' forces on the Sidi community at Gori Pir Hill as either 'positive' or 'negative.' Rather, the conflicting agendas and perspectives focusing on Sidi 'Africanity' are part of a larger circulation of new transnationally conceived cultural values that both serve to limit and broaden avenues in which Sidi communities can pursue economic and social mobility. At this point it would be naive to celebrate the rise of Sidi self-determination or self-definition since opportunities for economic and social mobility are still extremely limited and very much determined by outside forms of power. Whether these various processes can be read as an instance in which new forms of transnationality 'liberate the local and the regional from specifically national constraints' remains to be seen (Jameson and Miyoshi 2001: xiii).

From a historical perspective, the arrival of the ancestors of Sidis to the Indian subcontinent highlights the fact that 'globalisation' is nothing new. As a historical diaspora, Sidi communities reveal the limitation of framing events only within the nation-state. When we look at African diasporic communities within the Indian Ocean as a unit of analysis, such histories are no longer relegated to a periphery, rather they suggest different avenues of historical understanding, focused on the Indian Ocean as a site of transnational trade, cultural exchange and continual invention. Most interesting for diaspora scholarship, the Indian Ocean African diaspora promises to reveal markedly different historical and contemporary constructions of Africa compared to its Atlantic counterpart. Perhaps Paul Gilroy's conception of diaspora and identity formation in his book *The Black Atlantic*, which focuses on 'routes' rather than 'roots,' would be a helpful starting point when thinking about the histories of Sidi communities (Gilroy 1993: 190). This emphasis on routes allows us to conceive of their negotiations of a diasporic identity and its social, cultural and political implications within the context of historical specificities, which link their histories to other moments of transculturation. The theories and frameworks developed in the study of the Atlantic diaspora will be important in understanding how Sidi communities both engage and ignore their diasporic heritage and how in fact diaspora consciousness can be 'discontinued' and at another historical moment 'remembered' again. But as Edward Alpers has cautioned,

using frameworks developed to study Atlantic diasporas must be applied with a critical awareness that will eventually produce new theoretical models for conceptualising the Indian Ocean world (Alpers 2000: 94).

While we grapple with the implications of different theoretical models, the Sidi community of Gori Pir Hill is also negotiating the intersection of different locations, between their own position, governmental programmes, and scholarly knowledge production, in an attempt to engender new power constellations. Through their active participation in the complicated process of identity formation their experiences demonstrate the importance of locating the diasporic experience within local social and political struggles. Furthermore, this paper has begun to highlight the importance of local spaces such as the shrine of Gori Pir, which can be conceived of as symbolic, ritual or physical, as sites where members of marginalised communities rework, challenge or appropriate local, national and transnational agendas.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Paul Greenough, Director of the University of Iowa Crossing Borders Programme, for including me in this project. The guidance of Allen F. Roberts was also central to my participation in Crossing Borders. Furthermore, I am grateful for my conversations with Beheroze Shroff, whose unique perspective in part inspired me to think through the issues presented here; Brett van Hoesen's advice was also invaluable to the initial stages of this paper. Finally, I am indebted to the kindness, insights, and humour of our hosts in India.
2. Helene Basu's work was central to our research project because of its specific focus on the present day Sidi community in Gori Pir village, but the ground breaking work of Joseph Harris (1971, 1982) first documented the historical trajectories of the east African diaspora in the Indian Ocean world.
3. Crystal Bartolovich (2000) succinctly charts the various academic debates regarding the significance, timeline and meaning of globalisation. As she notes, the belief that the nation-state is an outmoded or imperilled force in the face of the transnational late capitalist market unites many 'strong' globalisation theorists like Arjun Appadurai and Fredric Jameson. Particularly pertinent to this paper is her observation that while earlier work on globalisation conceived of it as a rupture with the past and definitive of contemporary life, recent work by such theoreticians as Masao Miyoshi and Giovanni Arrighi have focused on the continuity between contemporary globalisation and other historical systems.

4. An excellent discussion by Laura Lewis (2000) of similar intersections between national, scholarly and local interests in the historically black region of the southern Pacific Coast of Mexico underscores the importance of understanding the local impact of national and transnational projects interested in 'rediscovering' cultural traditions of African diasporas.
5. As documented by Edward Alpers (2000), this lyre type is called *tanburah* throughout the Middle East and beyond. Its Sudanese origins are signalled by the very name *tanburah* and throughout the various regions of its use it is consistently associated with therapeutic spirit possession practices (99).
6. One member of our group was from Tanzania and this also shaped the reactions our Sidi hosts had to our visit.

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The Siddis of Uttara Kannada

History, Identity and Change among African Descendants in Contemporary Karnataka*

Charles Camara

Introduction

In one of the forest villages in the Western Ghats, in the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka, there are individuals who in their physical appearance differ from the rest of the Indian population. They have very dark skin and frizzy hair in marked contrast to other Indians. Known by others as Siddi, Habshi, Kaphri, African and Negro they prefer to refer to themselves simply as Siddi. They have scarce knowledge about their origin outside their habitat. However, a few elderly Siddis do know some details about their origin. On 28 January 1996 Krishna Francis Siddi, aged 72, told me his version of his community's origin:

A long time ago a Hindu king brought my ancestors here from a place called Africa. The Hindu king wanted to have strong and hardworking men to work on his property and women to work in his many houses. So he sent ships beyond the horizon and brought our ancestors. Then the Portuguese came and they brought Siddis to Goa to work in their houses. Then the British came with more Siddis from Africa to work in their army and fight against the Indians. When they had a chance our forebears fled from Goa and Bombay and settled here and in other parts of Uttara Kannada.

Krishna Francis Siddi does not remember who told him these details. He says: 'Perhaps it was my father or grandfather, but none of them had fled. But I heard of a Siddi who has relatives in Goa.' Mr. Krishna Francis Siddi has no knowledge if there are any Siddis in other parts of India today. He says that there surely lived Siddis in Goa and Bombay but he does not know if they still live there today.

Generally, Siddis in Uttara Kannada have limited knowledge about their history. They are not even sure if they have one history or several, or if they are one group or several. Nevertheless, members of this population, designated as Siddis by researchers (see for example, Palakshappa 1976 and Lobo 1984) do not identify themselves as Africans, but as Indians. Yet the common public in Uttara Kannada do not always identify them as Indians, but as 'Africans'. Who are the Siddis and where do they come from? Is it possible that these Siddis of Uttara Kannada are descendants of Africans transported to Western India during the last centuries?

Results from my analysis of a selection of existing source materials and field investigations in different parts of India suggest that permanent settlements of African descendants have been established at least since the early 16th century onwards. Several of these settlements exist today in various pockets in India, though not necessarily in the same places where they historically were formed. That is to say, through migration of ex-slaves and free persons of African origin within India and through import of Africans to other parts of India, new settlements emerged. One of these settlements is located in the hilly district of Uttara Kannada. It is this population of African descent, known as 'Siddis,' that I will deal with in the following pages.

African Descendants, or Siddis, in Contemporary India

Siddis today are to be found in various small pockets in India. A few of these settlements have a continuous history over several centuries, but most do not. For example, in the mid-15th century there was a population of several thousand Africans in Bengal and between 1486 and 1493 the kingdom was ruled by an African regime. When it finally fell due to mismanagement, the Africans were expelled from the kingdom. They drifted south towards the Deccan and to Gujarat in the west, and many found employment as mercenaries (Sadiq Ali 1996: 31, Khalidi 1988: 6–7). These 'Bengali Africans,' who were Muslims, married local Indian Muslims; some also found partners within their own community. This resulted in a dispersed population of mixed origin, with Islam as a binding force between the Africans and Indians. In central India there are a few scattered populations of Siddis, who have largely adapted themselves to local conditions, such as religion, language and caste designation. They are few in numbers

and a majority of them have mixed with Indians through intermarriage. It is reported that in Lucknow there are approximately 500 Siddis, and that there may be a few hundreds of Siddis in Calcutta and Delhi. Probably there are Siddis also in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu in Southeast India (Hiremath 1993: 65–66). It is also reported that there are Siddis in the south Indian state of Kerala, but no evidence is provided that may substantiate this statement (Lodhi 1991). Generally, historical sources are mute on how settlements of African descendants were formed and when it took place. In present-day India, some of the Siddi settlements have maintained an identity separate from that of the surrounding Indians by practising endogamy, whilst others lack clear distinction from other Indians due to intermarriage, migration or perhaps through a conscious strategy to become integrated with the rest of Indian society.

The three major Siddi populations in India are found in the states of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Besides being named Siddis, others than themselves also refer to the African descendants as Habshi, Kaphri, Shamal, Badsha, Landa, Kafira, African and Negro in various languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Konkani, Gujarati, Telugu and Urdu.

Siddis of Uttara Kannada

In the hilly areas of Uttara Kannada, located in the Western Ghats, there are approximately 12,000 Siddis (Siddi Development Society 1999). They adhere to three world religions. 45 per cent are Roman Catholics, 30 per cent are Sunni Muslims and 25 per cent are Hindus. The Siddis also believe in various kinds of spirits inhabiting in the natural environment and they practice 'ancestor worship/veneration'. Some scholars believe that Siddis belong to a common ethnic stock (Lobo 1984, Gazetteer of Bombay 1883). In my opinion these Siddis represent people of at least two different routes of migration, corresponding to their present-day affiliation either to Islam on one hand and Catholicism and Hinduism on the other hand. The Muslims originally migrated from Janjira Island south of Bombay, Bombay city, and probably also from the Deccan region in central India where Indian rulers imported Africans as soldiers in their armies. The Catholics and Hindus originally belonged to the same stock and migrated from Goa. When they lived in Goa, most probably they already were

Catholics. Only after they shifted to Uttara Kannada did some Siddis settle in areas inhabited by Hindu tribals and upper caste Hindus, and thus changed religion. Adaptation to the new religion and culture probably began to take place at least a century ago. Palakshappa (1976) asserts that the Siddis have emulated the values and culture not of other low caste groups in the area, but of upper or 'dominant' castes in Uttara Kannada. It is, of course, possible that some Siddi families who were permanently living with the upper castes as bonded labourers (which was common until recently) might have adopted some aspects of their landlord's culture. But I find it more likely that a majority of the Siddis adapted themselves to the culture and mode of living of other low caste groups, or tribals, inhabiting the same forest areas. This is indicated by the food habits, type of house constructions and some cultural performances which the Siddis share with the latter.

Most of the Siddis are settled in the rural and forest areas of Uttara Kannada. The settlement locations are of two types: on slopes and on plateaus. On the slopes they live in homesteads, that is, each nuclear family has its own house and agricultural plot, and remains separate from others. Thus these Siddis do not live in what is commonly referred to as a 'village,' but they classify a number of homesteads as belonging to one settlement, or *halli*. Settlements on the plateaus are of a different kind. In these areas they live in villages, or *koppa*. The difference between a *halli* and a *koppa* is that the Siddis regard the former as a geographically and socially 'backward' area, whereas the latter is a 'developed' area. According to one Siddi:

In *koppa* people are more advanced and are used to interact with other people, whereas in *halli* people remain backward because they live in remote places and have little interactions with Siddis and other castes. But this difference may no longer be that clear cut today as it was earlier. Because nowadays many *hallis* are as developed as the *koppas*. Very few Siddi settlements are now existing in isolation.

An average village in the plateau is constituted of two to six dozen houses. The village itself is cut by a few metres wide mud road and the houses are arranged in a row on each side of the road. The main entrance door faces the mud road. At the side of the house these Siddis have a cattle shed. At the back side of the house the Siddis have a small kitchen garden where fruits, vegetables and chillies are cultivated, normally during the rainy season. Prior to the 1990s whatever

was produced in the kitchen garden was for domestic consumption. However, lately with financial support from their own welfare organisation, Siddi Development Society (SDS), the Siddis are also producing surplus for sale in the local market, though this is done on a very limited scale.

Social interaction among Siddis of different religious denominations has always been limited. The main reason for this situation was the distances between the settlements and lack of transport facilities. Marriages took place with a person belonging to the same religion. Nevertheless, during the last few decades some mixed marriages have taken place between Hindu and Christian Siddis. The Muslim Siddis, however, only marry among themselves and not with other Siddis, though there are a few cases when Muslim Siddis married Christian Siddis. These Muslim Siddis are not strictly endogamous, as they do not mind marrying other Muslims in the locality; yet their opportunity to do so is limited by the stigma they have in the eyes of other Muslims.

Experiencing Racial and Caste-based Discrimination

The Siddi settlements are located often far away from other Indians, regardless of which caste they belong to. It is common for Siddis that they live by themselves, not because they want to but mainly because other Indians do not wish to reside in the same area as they do. In the eyes of high and low caste Indians the Siddis are designated at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, just above the so-called 'Untouchables' or dalits. However, the Siddis experience that they are treated as if they were 'Untouchables' if not worse, because of their skin colour and physical appearance. During the 1990s some migration to Siddi settlements has taken place; the migrants who belong to the low castes have travelled from other parts of Karnataka and neighbouring states. These migrants consider that they are compelled to reside in the same area as the Siddis, because they are not welcome to stay with other castes. This view held by migrants of low castes shows the tense situation between Siddis and other Indians, a conflict based not only on caste rules but also on 'race', resulting in discriminating attitudes and practices towards the Siddis. There are many examples of discrimination, based on caste or race, experienced by the Siddis. Here follows a random sample from my field notes. A middle aged Muslim Siddi, Hussein bin Abdullah, provides a few examples:

Earlier we Siddis were not allowed inside the house of other castes or to dine with them or marry them. When we worked for the landlord food was given to us on a plantain leaf and not on a plate. After the meal we had to clean the place with cow dung. In some restaurants we were not given entry, the owner chased us away. In teashops we were given a separate cup which we had to wash and keep separately in the corner. No one but Siddis used this cup. All this was very humiliating for us, so we avoided interacting with other people unless necessary.

Discrimination took place not only in public places but also at government offices. Shiva Putta Siddi, a Hindu man in his sixties, narrated the following examples:

I know many Siddis whose complaints at the police station were not recorded simply because we are Siddis. They did not take us seriously and sometimes used to chase us away from the police station. It even happened that the police asked us 'How dare you to come here and file a complaint against that nice landlord you are working for?' Several times I have experienced humiliation at government offices. I had to wait outside the building whereas others were allowed to sit in the waiting room. Sometimes I had to wait the whole day because others were given preference. I can tell you numerous examples when Siddis were cheated in the grocery shops and on buses. In the grocery shops it was a custom to give a lesser amount of rice or sugar to us Siddis. If we ever dared to complain we were not allowed to buy from that shop again; this was very difficult as there was only one shop in the area. On buses if a Siddi was seated he had to stand up and give the seat to any other caste person. Bad words were regularly used to humiliate us, just for the sake of fun. I remember an incident when even a ten year old child from an upper caste family called me a bad word in front of his parents; they did not do anything about it. Those days were horrible; it makes me cry to think of it. During the last few years our lives have improved. Still there is much to desire.

Language Use: African or Indian?

Several Indian researchers, activists and common citizens of Uttara Kannada have informed me that the Siddis have a peculiar language which only they are able to understand. Only when they speak with outsiders do they change the language from 'Siddi *bhasha*,' meaning the Siddi language, to other Indian languages. One British missionary and polyglot working with Catholic Siddis told me that the Siddis' language is a mixture of Indian and African languages. It is obvious that this is not a pure Indian language. It is used only by them and is called 'Siddi *bhasha*.' The way they pronounce words with that gut-

tural voice is also typical in East Africa, so obviously there are African influences in their language.

Responding to my inquiry, this British polyglot, who wished to be anonymous, was not able to present any linguistic evidence to support his argument about the uniqueness of the Siddis' language. In my view, there is nothing unique in the way the Siddis speak. The guttural sound is also made by some members of other Indian castes, and it is possible that some ethnic groups in East Africa today and earlier also make use of the guttural sound while speaking. It seems to me that the suggestions put forward by non-Siddis about '*Siddi bhasha*' are nothing but baseless speculations that have nothing to do with linguistics. Rather the suggestions are made on superficial connections between the physical appearance of the Siddis as not being 'real Indians' and images of members of ethnic groups in present-day Africa. I suggest that, unless proven to the contrary with linguistic evidence, so far no one has put forward solid evidence that proves that the Siddis' language is a mixture of 'African' and 'Indian' languages.

The Siddis themselves, regardless of religious and linguistic affiliation, do not regard that there is something called '*Siddi bhasha*' that is unique to them. And definitely they do not claim that the way they speak is influenced by 'African' languages. As Mori Santan Siddi, a Catholic Siddi woman in her late seventies puts it:

You're asking me if I can speak any African language? I don't even know where Africa is located and which language the people over there speak. Is Konkani an African language? How can it be when it is spoken in Goa which is located in Bharat [India]? I don't know the answer and it doesn't concern me. I have spoken this language throughout my life and it is called 'Konkani'. This is the language spoken by most of the Siddis. It is also spoken in Goa, I know that because I have been there and I could speak with the Goan people in Konkani. For the Catholics this is our mother tongue. For us who are old this is the only language we know. The youngsters nowadays are able to speak Kannada because they have learned it in school. The Hindu Siddis also speak Konkani. But the Muslim Siddis speak a Mohammedan language called Urdu which only they understand. You are asking me if there is a '*Siddi bhasha*'? I don't know. But if there is then it is Konkani that is the '*Siddi bhasha*.' Surely, the Muslim Siddis will disagree with me because they regard Urdu as the real language of all Siddis. So for them Urdu is '*Siddi bhasha*.'

The way Mori Santan Siddi is speculating here is informative. She freely admits that she does not know anything about Africa or if the

Siddis speak any African language. As she has visited Goa, where Konkani is the main language since pre-Portuguese times, she can suggest that Konkani may not be an African language but an Indian one. But she makes it clear that Siddis of different religions regard different Indian languages as their mother tongue, or '*Siddi bhasha*'. At least for her there is nothing called a unique '*Siddi bhasha*' that is used by all Siddis, because the Muslim Siddis regard Urdu as their mother tongue. For her, as for most Siddis of her age, Kannada is not their first language; it is a language acquired recently by learning it in school and—I may add—through the increased interaction with members of other Indian castes who are Kannada speaking.

Let me further elaborate and provide a few examples that substantiate Mori Santan Siddi's speculation about the occurrence of language use among the Siddis. The use of language is fairly complex among the Siddis. The language a Siddi regards as mother tongue depends on gender, age and religious affiliation. The male Muslims regard Urdu as their mother tongue, whilst among the female Muslims some regard Urdu and some Marathi as their mother tongue (Marathi is a common language in the northern parts of Uttara Kannada). Among themselves all Muslims speak Urdu, but when the women interact they prefer to speak Marathi with each other, though they are nowadays fluent in Urdu and have some knowledge of Kannada—the main language of Karnataka state in which district of Uttara Kannada is located. All Catholic and Hindu Siddis regard Konkani as their mother tongue and it is spoken among them on a daily basis. Most Siddis nowadays, regardless of religious affiliation speak Kannada, though some are more proficient than others, but none regards it as their mother tongue or main language. A majority of the young Muslims do not speak Konkani, which suggests that they cannot have lived in a Konkani speaking area such as Goa before they settled in Uttara Kannada. This has resulted in a situation where Hindu and Catholic Siddis speak Kannada with the Muslims just as they speak Kannada with non-Siddis. One consequence of this is that the relations between the Hindus and Catholics are closer than those they maintain with Muslims. Most young Siddi men speak Hindi, which they use to communicate with people who neither command Konkani nor Kannada. As far as I know none of the Siddis spoke any 'African' language (see also Hiremath 1993 who arrives at the same conclu-

sion). Nevertheless, it is possible that they might have retained some words and phrases from their ancestors' original African languages, although their heterogeneity appears to argue against this. As mentioned earlier, my guess is that from the 17th century onwards most of the Muslim Siddhis in Uttara Kannada migrated from Janjira island (and also from Bombay city and the Deccan), where the Siddhis were knowledgeable in Urdu, some Arabic and possibly Marathi, having lived on the island for centuries and not retained their original languages from their ancestors' places in Africa (Chauhan 1995).

Changes in Siddhi Communities since the 1980s

Prior to the 1980s the forest provided the Siddhis with most of what they needed to maintain them. Today, due to restrictions from the state, they have to look for other avenues for their livelihood and economic survival. About half of the population own a plot of land (at average one to three acres) where they cultivate paddy rice and some other grains. A few also occasionally cultivate cotton. Agriculture is very important for all Siddhis but few possess sufficient land to feed themselves. In addition to agriculture, they are also engaged in various kinds of manual work. One common occupation, both for men and women, is to work as wage and contract labourers for the members of Hindu upper castes in the area. Often they are badly paid and become bonded labourers for these upper castes. Since the early 1990s many Siddhis, particularly those in their early twenties, have migrated to Goa and other urban areas in search of jobs. The men work at construction sites and the women work as domestic servants mostly for Christian and Hindu well to do families. More than often they are badly paid and cheated by their employers. But the Siddhis say that the situation is even worse in their native places, where they can hardly make ends meet.

In our conversations the Siddhis often mentioned about their poor material situation and how severely they are discriminated against by the rest of Indian society, as well as by the state officials of Uttara Kannada. They said that their situation was even worse prior to the 1980s, when they were a dispersed population, without any unity among themselves and neglected by others. In the beginning of the 1980s, however, two local Catholic priests took interest in the Siddhis and provided them with financial means and assisted them in organising themselves and set up a community hall. A few social workers (not Siddhis) were

employed to assist them and together they established a core group. During the following months some of the more alert Siddi leaders were selected and together in 1984 they founded an activist cum welfare association called the All Karnataka Siddi Development Association (AKSDA). However, the life of this association was short. As a result of internal difficulties and lack of knowledge about how to run an association, problems arose. Funds were mismanaged and plans did not materialise as planned. After a few years of existence with ups and downs AKSDA finally became dysfunctional. But that did not stop some of the younger Siddi men, who continue the struggle. A new attempt was made with a new set up and new set of management consisting of young Siddi men who at least were literate (in contrast to AKSDA management in which most of the members were illiterate). And again with financial support from abroad a new association was formed in 1990, the Siddi Development Project (SDP).

The new association immediately shifted its location to a small town called Yellapur and hired a few rooms in a new building thirty kilometres away from the AKSDA office. One of the first actions taken by SDP was to hold a rally in Yellapur. Some 6,000 Siddi men, women and children came out in the streets and demanded their 'right to be treated as human beings.' Street plays were performed showing how maltreated and discriminated against the Siddis are by the society and state. Representatives from different government bodies such as inspectors from the police department and officials from the forest department were invited for discussions on how to improve relations between the Siddis and the rest of society. The Siddis demanded, among other things, that the shop owners, bus conductors and teashop keepers should stop discriminating against them, that landlords and employers should pay them fairly, that the government should hand over rights to the Siddis for land which they cultivate as squatters and, finally, that the Siddis be given status as a Scheduled Tribe, which would ensure some state support. (In June 2002 the Siddis of Karnataka were finally classified by the President of India as a Scheduled Tribe, which entitles them to considerable state support regarding education, government jobs and representation in political structures.) The rally was successful in that thereafter the extent of discrimination has markedly reduced and the relations with the police and other authorities representing the state improved.

Since the formation of SDP a number of welfare projects have been carried out by the organisation. Four hostels for children have been founded, in order to provide primary education for those who live in the forest settlements where educational facilities are limited or not available at all. Various types of co-operative societies have been formed, oriented to agriculture, fishing, brick making, carpet weaving and collecting non-timber forest products. Aside from these co-operatives, women's associations have been established for each village or settlement. Their members are provided some basic education and given instructions to start saving schemes and to run their own fair price shops, with financial support from SDP. Villages are equipped with bore wells, and given access to fruit and vegetable seeds and bricks for house construction.

Several youth clubs were formed to organise the youth and to find employment for them. Incidentally, in 1996 one of the youth clubs was renamed the Nelson Mandela Club in connection with the state visit to India by the former President of South Africa. After his visit one of the Siddi leaders of SDP wrote a letter to President Mandela informing him about the existence and plight of Siddis in Uttara Kannada. The Siddi leader received a courtesy reply from the President's Office acknowledging that his letter had been received. The Siddi leader smiles when he relates this incident:

You cannot imagine how happy I and my fellow Siddis were when we received this letter. Look, this was the first time we Siddis contacted another African in Africa and the President came to know about our existence. By now he has forgotten about us but at least it is registered in his office that we Siddis in India exist and that we contacted him. This is a very precious letter for us and we have kept it in a safe place. Actually, I came to know about President Nelson Mandela only after I saw a photograph of him shaking hands with the President of India. I didn't know who he was but realised that he must be an important person as he is shaking hand with the President of India. I thought for myself 'who is this Siddi'? When I inquired with a long hair friend of mine [a phrase the Siddis use to describe a person who is not a Siddi] he told me about President Mandela's visit. Then I came to know that he is the President of Africa [sic]. So I discussed with other Siddi leaders and we decided to go to Delhi and meet him in person and tell him about us. But then it was too late, he had already returned to Africa [sic], so that's why we wrote to him. Anyhow, if he comes again to India we will definitely try to meet him.

Besides the Youth Clubs, a semi-professional cultural group for performing Siddi dances has been founded. This group, called Siddi Sanskruti Mandd, has participated in a number of programmes in several parts of India. All these economic and cultural activities were sponsored by funding aid agencies from Europe, channelled through Indian intermediary NGOs, secular and religious, as well as by Indian cultural institutes and the Government of Karnataka.

According to Siddi leaders members of the once scattered Siddi population, alienated among themselves on linguistic and religious grounds, are now closer to each other. They note that the staff and sponsors of SDP have created unity among the Siddis. The SDP administration wish to convey to Siddis as well as to other than Siddis that all Siddis belong to same caste or *zat* (derived from *jati*). That is to say, an underlying assumption held by SDP administration is that all Siddis, regardless of religious or linguistic adherence, have a common origin in Africa, and this is sufficient to regard them as belonging to one *zat*. The SDP administration is not concerned that present-day Siddis, or rather their ancestors, have different cultural and linguistic origins both within African and India before they settled in Uttara Kannada. Nevertheless, since its foundation, a number of projects have been initiated by SDP to unite the dispersed Siddis so as to imbibe sentiments that in order to progress it is necessary to be united and co-operate both within settlements and in the larger Siddi population. This is an ideology that SDP consciously wish to mould and display. In contrast to this view, many common Siddis who are not regular staff of SDP told me that this ideology was alien to them and they do not regard themselves as belonging to a homogenous group or *zat*. But at the same time they made it clear that there is something unique for the Siddis which makes them consider themselves as a *zat*, but not in the sense SDP wishes to regard. Although the Siddi leaders and SDP staff are likely to overemphasise this feeling of unity as an achieved fact, in practice, my understanding is that many Siddis who just a few years ago were indifferent to Siddis of different religions are today more inclined to interact and work together for common action. Intermarriages across religious divisions have become slightly more common, and there is now a degree of internal migration in the area so that Muslim Siddis settle in Hindu and Catholic Siddi settlements and vice versa.

Conclusion

In 1999 the foreign funding agency stopped its sponsorship of SDP after eight years of support. Already in 1996 the leaders of SDP and Siddis in general were told that the sponsorship would be gradually terminated and that they had to start planning for themselves about their future. The Siddis were very disappointed to learn this news and felt betrayed. The leaders were expecting support for another few years so that they could manage on their own. Now they thought that they were left orphaned and without any possibility to carry on with the projects that were initiated through external financial inputs. In 1999 the SDP reinvented itself by changing its name into Siddi Development Society (SDS) and with this new name applied for new funds from Indian funding agencies. The following year one dozen former employees of SDP were given employment by an Indian intermediary NGO to carry on with the development work among the Siddis. But except for salary for these one dozen staff no funds are provided to start new material projects. This is a big disappointment for the Siddis. However, the Siddi leaders are continuing to look out for funding agencies that will sponsor their future development. The present predicament of the Siddis is to decide which way to go in the future and how to get resources to follow that road. As one leader puts it:

For how long are we Siddis going to be dependent on others for our development? We would like to carry on on our own. But to do that requires resources which we do not have. The foreign funding agencies provided us the basic amenities like agricultural plots and bore wells and much more so that we at least can have proper food, clothes and shelter. We were also given some vocational training and knowledge how to organise ourselves. All this was good. But now we have to take the next step so that we can fend for ourselves also in the future. Some time ago we leaders had a meeting with a considerable number of Siddis. We told them that we have to fend for ourselves in the future and start saving our own cash to start development projects. But the Siddis resisted this view, saying that they do not have the capacity to save when their irregular salary is very low. So what can we leaders do? We are now equipped with knowledge and we know how to interact with state officials and society. But we do not have financial resources to carry on with our development work for the entire Siddi *zat*.

The Siddis of Uttara Kannada have changed a lot since their ancestors first left their places in Africa and since their forebears settled in Uttara Kannada. Major changes have taken place during the last

two decades and it is likely that further rapid changes will take place during the following years. The Siddis are compelled to leave the forest areas by state restrictions and laws. At the same time other Indians are moving into the limited forest areas thus competing with the Siddis for land and livelihood. An increasing number of Siddis are leaving the forest and rural areas and settling in Goa and other parts of urban India, thus being exposed to new cultural practices. The younger generation of Siddis are at least completing their primary education and are involved in the society in a different way than their parents' generation. Perhaps the major change that has taken place among the Siddis relates to the concept of *Siddiance Zat*, meaning the Siddi people. Prior to the 1980s this concept did not exist among the Siddis; it was coined by them only after they began to regard themselves as one people. As mentioned earlier, this is not an achieved fact but rather is an ongoing process. Today most of the Siddis think that they are more united and have better interaction among themselves, regardless of religious and linguistic affiliation, than two decades ago. Still they feel that much more can be done to strengthen their identity as one *zat*. They believe that they have more in common than that which separates them. The recent acknowledgement by the President of India by classifying all Siddis as belonging to one group, or more technically as a 'Scheduled Tribe,' has further boosted their common identity. Religious and linguistic differences are played down and nowadays they seem to be less inclined to identify themselves with their linguistic and religious brethren. This is a tremendous change compared to two decades ago. Although for many years several Christian, Hindu and Islamic organisations have been attempting to keep them separate, the Siddis do their best to resist this separation. At the same time several secular organisations are trying to morally support the Siddis to carry on with their unification. This further encourages the Siddis to publicly declare that they all belong to one group, to the *Siddiance Zat*. As one young Hindu Siddi leader declared boldly: '*Ami soghle ekh*' (we are all one). While some Siddis disagree with him, many more Siddis support his view.

Note

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African Indian Culture Articulation Mediation and Negotiation in Uttara Kannada

Pashington Obeng

This article examines the meanings and implications of African Indians' (Siddis) participation in the centenary feast of the canonisation of St. Rita, a patron saint of the Catholic Church in Mundgod, Karnataka, in southwest India, on 21–22 May 2000.¹ The form of the Catholic feast provided a context for the African Indians to mediate and negotiate their private and collective selves to express their culture and identity, thereby reframing the discourse of Catholic ceremonial. The feast was divided into two parts: the cultural celebration which took place on Saturday, 21 May, and the prescribed ritual worship called the liturgical celebration on 22 May. African Indians' involvement in both the cultural and liturgical celebrations will be shown as highlighting their agency and its implications for diasporic Africans on a global level. Their performance creates an important discourse of worship that helps them to reposition themselves as a distinctive African community, whose music and dance contribute to the multicultural, religiously plural and multilingual landscape of India.

Further, the paper examines how African Indians use their cultural expression as a resource for adjusting to change and preserving aspects of their heritage through their dance and music. In so doing, they adjust to the larger Indian society on their own terms. The paper explores the possibilities of and constraints on African Indian culture articulation, when, on the one hand, their performances are patronised by non-African Indians and they represent themselves in public places, and on the other hand, when their performances are self-directed.

The Karnataka African Indians are among descendants of Africans found at places such as Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. African Indians are divided into Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Their identities are thus tied to major religions (Harris 1971; Chauhan 1995; and Palakshappa 1976). Other scholars contend that given the Indian environment in which present-day African Indians find themselves, they have lost everything African in Karnataka (Sadiq Ali 1996; Chauhan 1995; and Palakshappa 1976). This discussion points out that present-day African Indians, as all humans, are culture architects who drop, add to and rework cultural elements passed on to them from their forebears. They are constantly engaged in cultural reconstruction. As a distinct group of people, African Indians perform their self-representation for their own people and at other times for non-African Indians as well.

Although African Indians of Karnataka, South India, have been in the Indian subcontinent for over four centuries (Harris 1971, Palakshappa 1976, Ali 1996), their cultural activities reflect not only local Indian practices, but also distinctive African Indian elements. The paper briefly discusses the Karnataka African Indians as a part of diasporic African Indian communities in India and moves on to discuss their involvement in specific rituals and festivals. Finally, the article touches on the process and implication of the African Indians' involvement in the celebration of the Catholic feast of the centenary celebration of St. Rita in Mundgod.

Recently, the Jesuit Society of Mundgod and Mandd Sobann from Mangalore have embarked on an African Indian (Siddi) 'cultural renaissance' with the exclusive stress on Konkani language and culture. The African Indians among whom I have been doing my research between 1998 and 2001 are residents of the Karnataka region of South India. They are part of Karnataka culture, speaking Kannada, Hindi, and Marathi in addition to Konkani. Some of the Muslims among them even speak Urdu. The Loyola Kendra Vikas (LVK), Mundgod of the North Karnataka Jesuit Society and Eric Ozario, the director of the Konkani cultural center in Mangalore and leader of Mandd Sobann, basing their choice on the cultural traits they have found among the African Indians of north Karnataka, argue that the overwhelming majority of the African Indians are part of Konkani culture. The Konkani language with its attendant practices may be traced back to

Goa and parts of the Konkan coast (Eaton 1978: 41) from where the forebears of some of the Christian and Hindu African Indians migrated to Karnataka (Palakshappa 1976; Lobo 1984; and Sadiq Ali 1996). Even the Muslims among them, whose ancestors might have migrated from Janjira and the Deccan region and thus speak Urdu and Marathi, have all been immersed in Konkani culture in Karnataka. Finally, as Ozario (n.d.) points out in a booklet on Konkani heritage, the Indian government has recognised Konkani as a language separate from Marathi. When Konkani was acknowledged as a state language, according to Camara, a research scholar on African Indians (personal correspondence October 2001), the Indian government granted a substantial amount of money towards the promotion of Konkani culture. The north Karnataka African Indian Konkani dialect (an admixture of Konkani, Marathi and Kannada) has therefore been given approval by the Indian government. Eric Ozario is one of the leaders working with about nineteen Konkani speaking 'tribal and ethnic groups'—including the African Indians of Karnataka (Camara, personal correspondence, October 2001)—to reinforce and promote the Konkani culture.

The Loyola Vikas Kendra (LVK), Mundgod, Mandd Sobhann, Mangalore and Vana Kala Mela, Khodse are the institutions that worked with the African Indians of the Mundgod and Yellapur *talukas* (subdistricts of Uttara Kannada district) to participate in the centenary celebration on 21–22 May 2000. Jesuit Fathers Guntipilly and Cutinha of the LVK group defined the purpose of involving African Indians and giving them a critical role in the feast as:

Identifying socio-cultural, historical and economic factors that have either enhanced or hampered the individual and collective development of Siddis in the Mundgod, Yellapur and Haliyal Talukas in Uttara Kannada... As part of exploring Siddi cultural history, we will touch on ways in which Siddi worldviews are intertwined with their lifeways and habitat. It is when we examine their key values against the backdrop of the ethos of the larger society that we will begin to appreciate areas of consonance, divergence, accommodation, conflict and innovation, rather than focusing on them as helpless victims (Interview, 15 July 2002).

In the pursuit of such goals as outlined above, the Jesuit Society invited African Indian men, women and children from neighbouring villages to receive training for their participation in the celebration of St. Rita's centenary. St. Rita of Cascia, the patron saint of the Mundgod

Parish, was an Augustinian nun born in 1381 in the province of Umbria, Italy. She was also a wife, mother of two boys, and later a widow and a woman who was known to have stressed forgiveness in her ministry. She became an invalid toward the end of her life and lived on charity from her fellow sisters. The church headquarters of the Jesuit Society in Mundgod was named after St. Rita.

Self-directed Culture Articulation

African Indian communities have organisational structures, under a *panchayat* (five member leadership group of men) headed by a *budvont* (Kannada word for a leader of the community), as well as women's, men's and youth groups at the village level. Additionally, some of their village leaders serve on the All Karnataka Siddi Development Association which was founded in 1986. The groups work in concert with others to provide opportunities for African Indian cultural expression. These cultural expressions take place during the dances and songs they perform: *sigmo*, *zakai*, *fugidi* and *dammam*. These vibrant songs and dances are performed at festivals and at related ceremonies and rituals in which African Indians participate. Muharram (Muslim), Deepavali, Ugadi or New Year's Day (Hindu), feasts of Catholic saints, occasions of birth, naming, marriage and death anniversaries are other times African Indians perform their dances and singing. After harvest, when African Indians are off their seasonal or full time jobs, they do participate in festivities within their communities to entertain and use such practices to socialise. At times, people who have received a special blessing from God or a deity could ask a dance troupe to perform as part of their thanksgiving to the deity. Footing the bill for the food and entertainment is meant to thank the deity.

African Indian cultural practices range from festivals that involve the whole community, others that involve a segment of it, to those that are family-centered. Apart from harvest festivals, marriages, funerals and other family or village festivities, some of the cultural activities are sponsored to give African Indians political and social exposure. The African Indian Mingel Siddi of Khodse, near Yellapur, and his Vana Kala Mela troupe have for the past ten years been an itinerant cultural group visiting villages to entertain and educate African Indians and non-African Indians.

Contrary to Lobo's point (1984: 64) that African Indians are not 'very religious in the sense of observance of prescriptions of their religions,' African Indian religiosity cannot be discounted simply on the basis of their nonobservance of certain religious prescriptions (Obeng 2000). In addition to their participation in collective religious festivals, African Indians tend to gather friends and relatives for the celebration of life-cycle rituals at the home and village levels. They use their drums, dances, and songs to celebrate such events.

Sigmo dances and songs can be traced to Goa, performed during the Hindu Holi festival (*Gazetteer of India* 1979: 263). *Fugidi* dances and songs are also shared by the Gaudas, Kunbis or Marathas of Goa and other peoples around the Goa state. It seems that *dammam* performances are similar to those found in Daman and Gujarat among the Muslim Siddis. According to Lobo (1984: 65) the similarity confirms the fact that the Karnataka African Indians share a common social link with other people of African descent along the Indian West Coast.

To look for correspondences between present-day African Indian cultural practices in Karnataka and others in Goa and elsewhere does not, however, do full justice to African Indian cultural reproduction. It is important to show ways in which a particular practice has been transformed in different contexts. For instance, the African Indian Catholics of Uginigarri and Kirvatti perform *sigmo* during late February and March at the beginning of the Lenten season. The men among them go around the villages singing, dancing and receiving gifts. They do this during the Lenten season of penance (Lobo 1984: 65). *Sigmo*, which was originally celebrated during a Hindu festival in Goa, is an example of how African Indian Christians have appropriated aspects of the singing and dancing of local Hindus to collect money as part of their Lenten celebration. The drum used for *sigmo* is called *gumat*, which is a pottery drum open at both ends but covered with an animal hide on one end.

Dammam tends to be performed for entertainment. The drumming, singing and dancing are called *dammam*. A *dammam* as a drum is a cylindrical wooden instrument about three or four feet long and one and a half to two feet in diameter (Lobo 1984: 67). The drummer sits so as to support horizontally the drum with his or her legs stretched forward. Both men and women may play the drum. When I first arrived in Mainalli in June of 1998, the African Indians of the village,

upon hearing from the Catholic priests and nuns, that an African had arrived, performed *dammam* to welcome me. Festivals and life-cycle events are also when *dammam* is performed. When African Indians perform either *sigmo* or *dammam*, in homes or villages, they themselves determine the occasions and the length of time of the performance. They may wear their work clothes or casual clothes for the performance since they are with their own people. During Lent, the life-cycle events and evening relaxation times, they could perform till very late at night before they retire to their homes or to bed. Such village performances at times include street theater during which African Indians comment on their own people and criticise the rich and powerful in India for exploiting the marginalised (Obeng 2000).

Despite the fact that other events to which they are invited to perform may be initiated 'from above,' such as by the church, state government officials, or the central government of India, African Indian participants employ the occasion to work out strategies for building up self and group confidence, as well as group identity. It is the case that they are numerically a minority who lack economic and technological facilities, yet their involvement fosters a strong sense of self-esteem, creativity, and group solidarity. The form of the church event (feast of St. Rita's canonisation), for instance, was used to articulate their Konkani culture by preserving and promoting their heritage and to foster change for themselves and the larger society. Thus, besides non-formal family settings during which African Indians are socialised, there are other formal and group contexts in which their cultural reworking and transmission of culture occur.

Patronised Public Articulation of Culture

Public functions at which African Indians have performed have served a variety of purposes. For instance, on 2 February 1997, the Karnataka state under the direction of politicians and the then director of what used to be the Siddi Development Project, Shivappa Poojari, a non-African Indian, inaugurated the Karnataka Konkani Sahitya Academy. At that gathering, African Indians performed some of their cultural dances and songs in Konkani. Also, African Indian community volunteers and other Konkani speakers were awarded ribbons. At the same time, the politicians aimed to win the support of the African Indians, who are part of the marginalised in India, who numbered about

4,000 at the event (Abraham Joseph and Fr. Francis Guntipilly, personal communication in August 1998). This contingent was thus an important voting block on which the politicians were counting. Under Poojari, a number of the African Indians were invited to perform at varying events including the opening of a hostel in Gullapur, which is a predominantly Hindu community. On such occasions, African Indian culture articulation was used to entertain the audience, thereby presenting or advertising them as a people with a distinctive culture who are part of the Karnataka and Indian landscape. Bhabha's contention about how groups articulate their 'differences' is appropriate here. Bhabha (1994: 269) argues that these 'spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood and communal representations that generate new signs of cultural difference and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.'

Therefore it seems that, depending on who patronises a cultural event and the framework within which the event takes place, African Indians have either an elastic or limited terrain for their cultural representation and self-expression. In effect, African Indians live in communities with highly stratified social and discursive fields whereby their cultural performances are framed within a series of meta-narratives. Father Francis Guntipilly, however, argues that on previous occasions, the African Indians were not well organised to assert themselves past cameo appearances (personal communication, August 2001). When they were sent to Kerala, Bangalore and Delhi for cultural festivals, they received rave reviews in Indian newspapers including the *Talk of the Town*, Yellapur in June 1991. But after all those public appearances, they went back to their villages to serve as agricultural labourers, coolies, domestics, and hunters, to name a few of their occupations. For instance, the reporter for the *Talk of the Town*, wrote: 'Like their ancestors from Africa music and dance are in their blood. And a group from Yellapur won a National award in Thekhady, Kerala' (Mogata, 1991).

Unlike previous times when African Indians may have felt powerless, they are asserting themselves in different contexts. The use and articulation of Konkani culture even in a patronised framework is being deployed by the African Indians as a political action. Despite the fact that their geo-social spaces seem controlled by the rich and powerful members of the society, African Indians use the 'performance au-

thority' (Bhabha 1994:270) of the Konkani culture to resist their oppression. They use their understanding of their distinct culture based on their heritage, physical features, their communities of residence, and their differing worldviews on feast days and other celebrations to create and renew religious culture and instill pride in themselves. We will now turn specifically to the centenary of St. Rita's canonisation and the importance of the role the African Indians played in its celebration.

St. Rita's Centenary of Canonisation in Mundgod

St. Rita's Parish is the headquarters of the Mundgod district of the Catholic Church, in the Karwar Diocese. Present at the feast were the Bishop of Karwar (of which Mundgod is a subdistrict), the Provincial from Bangalore, priests and Holy Cross sisters who work among the African Indians. The district covers an area of about 300 square miles with a population of about 70,000 people. Of this population, Hindus form about 80 per cent while Christians are about 5 per cent and the rest are Muslims. Among the 14,000 African Indians (*Census of Siddis* 1998) in the Uttara Kannada district, there are about 3,000 who are Christians. This was the first time that the 'Siddi Konkani' was incorporated in the liturgy at St. Rita's Parish although some African Indians have been members of the parish for decades.

The feast began with a cultural celebration on 21 May 2000 to which Christians and non-Christians were invited. It is important to understand the context within which this festival was held. Some of the members of the local community were uncertain of the motives of the priests. They suspected some religious leaders of using such occasions for converting non-believers. For example, Fr. Cutinha (interview, 10 July 2001) shared the story of an African Indian Muslim woman who attended the first part of the celebration on Saturday morning all by herself before she brought some members of a women's group (Mahila Mandal) from Kendelgarri (a predominantly Muslim village) to attend the rest of the feast. The Muslim woman, according to Fr. Cutinha, wanted to learn whether the invitation to and involvement of Christian and non-Christian African Indians was aimed at converting the non-Christians to Christianity. Having satisfied herself that the participation of African Indians was part of the Jesuits' efforts to provide social and cultural development for them (African

Indians) without asking them to renounce their faiths if they were not Christians, the woman brought many other women from her village. Karnataka African Indians are known to attend Hindu and Muslim festivals and even perform some of their dances and songs. For instance, in Kirvatti, Kendelgarri, Mainalli and Gunjavatti, social interactions among the African Indians—and at times the quest for special spiritual help—cut across the religious differences. Muslim and non-Muslim African Indians do participate in processions that African Indian Muslims hold during Muharram and some Muslim feasts. Similarly, non-Hindu African Indians also participate in Hindu festivals. African Indian social workers Bennit Siddi and Krishna Siddi pointed out (personal communication, 20 July 2001) that African Indians have over the years been divided along religious lines and, as a divided people, it has been easy for their people to be exploited. Therefore, when African Indians are found participating in many festivities, be they Muslim or Hindu, they are simply affirming their racial and ethnic identity beyond a religious context.

The Cultural Celebration

In order to understand the cultural and liturgical context in which African Indian culture articulation took place, we will first look at the cultural programme that happened on the Saturday preceding the liturgical celebration on Sunday, 22 May 2000. We will focus on the *dammam* song and dance performed by men and women, though they did *fugidi* and *zakai* as well. The men's songs and dance were a fusion of symbolic gestures with vignettes of stories from their life situations rendered exclusively in Konkani such as the following:

Dadle rannha ghele kumbe panna ekhtain korun khatir tenche gharan pasht gallunk.

Men went into the forest to collect *kumbe* (broad forest leaves) for roofing their house. As they picked the leaves one of them picked up a snake hiding under the fallen leaves. As he showed the snake to the others, he was told not to be afraid. He shook the snake as if it were a mere leaf. At this stage all the dancers made the gesture of picking up the snake and shaking it.

Dadleankh meddlo tambde muyecho kotto gavlow.

The men found a large red ant nest. The men next turned to the branch of the tree and found a huge red ant nest which they wanted to harvest for *chutney* (an Indian condiment). They found that they were being

bitten by the ants. This was the stage at which their leader advised them to go home.

As various aspects of their experience were being narrated through song, the gestures of the dancers reinforced the message of the snake in hand and the bite of the ants. Finally, the dance ended with the men leaving the stage to show they had gone home. The snake and the ants are symbolic of the hardships they encounter as they strive to live in Karnataka, according to Mothes Caithan Siddi (one of the dancers).

A third part of the series was about a hunting expedition.

Dadle ekh sunnha ghen shikari korunk ghele

Men went hunting with a dog. When they came close to the game, their dog tried to mate with the game, which impeded the hunt. The animal began to escape and the head hunter shouted to one of the men who was lame to hurry because the animal was escaping.

The dancers called out to the one limping to encourage him to hurry before the animal escaped. The dancers called out and mimed limping simultaneously. According to Mingel, who was the African Indian leader of the cultural troupe, the last piece was equally a multi-layered song and dance. The dog's action stood for the distractions that some African Indians allow to come their way. The handicapped person did not let his disadvantage prevent him from hurrying after the game.

Women African Indians also performed a *dammam* on this occasion. The women sang about the high cost of living and its attendant frustrations.

Garam masalow, garam masalow, don paisancho garam masalow, kaso ghalchore, marog masalow?

How can we put spices in the food when they are expensive? Spices had been tied in the knot at the end of a woman's cloth but the knot has become untied and the spices fell. Two paisa worth of spices has fallen away.

Where can we find the spices?

Let's search for the spices.

Where is the chicken that was raised here?

Come, come chicken. Who beheaded the chicken? Where are you?

Here comes the chicken. Come, come chicken.

In the old days, says Clara Marian Siddi (one of the women dancers), women kept precious items in the knot at the end of their saree (unstitched dresses for women.) Any woman whose knot became un-

Figure 11

Centenary of the Canonisation of St. Rita Cultural Programme

21 May 2000

6:00 PM

President:	Fr. Jerome D'Souza, Dean, Haliyal Deanery
Chief Guest:	Prof. Boralingiah, Head, Department of Tribal Studies, Hampi University
Guests of Honour:	Fr. Ronald Prabhu SJ Provincial, Karnataka Jesuit Province Prof. Sripad Shetty, Ph.D. Mr. Eric Ozario President, Mandd Sobann, Mangalore Mr. Mingel Anthon Siddi Leader, Vena Kala Mela, Khodse, Yellapur

Programme

1. Prayer Dance
2. Welcome and
Introduction of Guests: Fr. Francis Guntipilly, SJ
Superior, Mundgod Mission
3. *Sigmo* Dance by Siddis
4. History of St. Rita's Church: Dr. V.F. Gudioho
5. Group Song by Siddis
6. Honouring the Senior
Parishioners
7. *Fugudi* Fr. R. Prabhu SJ
8. *Zakai*
9. Group Dance Siddis
10. *Chintana* Mr. Mingel Siddi
11. *Dammam* by Siddi Women
12. Food for Thought Prof. Boralingiah
13. *Dammam* by Siddi Men
14. Distribution of Prizes Fr. Jerome D'Souza
15. Vote of Thanks
16. Group Song in Honour of St. Rita

tied could lose money, spices and jewellery. There were women who were divorced because their knots were not tied well. In this song and dance, a woman asked others to help her search for her money to buy spices for a chicken meal. She could not find the money, could not find the spices and the chicken was feared to have been beheaded by someone. They helped her to search until they found the chicken and then they called the chicken. Through song and gestural language, the women dramatised the motif of the frustration, pain, and hopelessness they face as they struggle to feed their families. Despite the objections of some of the Kannada speakers, the performance of the *dammam* gave the audience some insight into how the lives of African Indian agricultural labourers, hunters and domestics are filled with danger, disappointments and moments of hope and perseverance.

Father Guntipilly (personal communication, 26 July 2001) contends that by incorporating African Indian (Siddi) Konkani culture in the centenary celebration, the Jesuit Society was applying the post-Vatican II Pope Paul VI encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1969). The encyclical encourages the Catholic Church to incorporate aspects of people's life situations, sensibilities, hopes and anxieties into worship. The liturgical renewal is part of the church's effort at creating an Indian Catholic Church as approved by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) in March 1969. Examples of liturgical renewal in the African Catholic church have been written about by scholars such as Kirby (1994) and Obeng (1996). Similarly, African Indian Konkani singing and dancing were deployed as sanctioned by the Church to enrich worship and honour St. Rita while simultaneously paying due recognition to African Indian life situations. The African Indian dancers at the feast were playing a major role in liturgical renewal. The form, melody, rhythm and gestural idioms they used helped in community building and self-definition. The African Indians, a marginalised people who are often 'seen' on market days in Mundgod and at other market towns but not 'heard' or conversed with, were transforming church culture at the parish headquarters. As the men and women used symbolic gestures to mime hunting, marketing and harvesting motifs, they were asserting ecclesiastical and political authority from their marginalised status in Karnataka.

As expected, there were Kannada- and Marathi-speaking worshippers who felt offended when African Indian Konkani was given promi-

nence during the centenary celebration. Some of the worshippers complained to Fr. Guntipilly that they could not worship as they used to because the liturgy was being destroyed. Some of the Catholics who complained were the landowners and merchants in the Mundgod sub-district. Among the African Indian performers at the feast were men and women from Kendelgarri and Mainalli who worked as agricultural labourers for some of the landowners. The objection of such worshippers helps us understand how religious or liturgical change is marked by areas of tension, accommodation and innovation. The use of African Indian Konkani language also points to the reordering of power relations in worship whereby the least and the most downtrodden in the community, formerly without a voice, have their language taken as a language of liturgy. The opportunity to incorporate African Indian culture and language enabled them to enact their life stories. Within the church framework, the African Indians performed their identity and self-presentation.

African Indians' imitative acts and enactment of stories about aspects of their personal and collective lives are sometimes performed with props such as pottery drums, plastic or aluminum pots, long sticks, and dust pans. The imitative acts may express hunting, marketing, harvesting, and housekeeping motifs, and draw the attention of their audience to unfamiliar facets of African Indian lives. Bame's (1991) description of African dance and drama provides examples of how continental Africans express important aspects of their individual and social lives to help their audience to be at once outside observers and mental participants of the unfolding events. Like their counterparts in Africa, African Indianmen's *dammam* (*dadleancho dammam*), words and gestural taxonomy articulate the bitter experiences of African Indians, social evils, the risks of work, and the African Indian determination to make the best of their lot in India. The women's *dammam* (*bailancho dammam*), and *zakai*, express words and ideas about the significance of interdependence, self-help, moral support and the need to meet one's obligations.

Thus the feast of St. Rita was a mutli-faceted Christian celebration. As the African Indians performed and prizes were awarded to the participants, the feast unfolded on many levels of cultural and religious elaboration.

Participation in the feast also fostered the renewal of African Indian art forms for individuals and groups because they have developed their artistic skills. Nursery school teacher Sushila Mariam of Mainalli contended in an interview on 2 August 2001 that the participants from Mainalli were invited by people in their own village and in neighbouring villages to perform at weddings and funerals. Those who invite them pay the dancers and singers a fee. African Indians after the May 2000 St. Rita’s feast are discovering that they are becoming more proficient at composing new songs and improving their singing and dancing skills and abilities. Through dance and song, the African Indians helped the rest of the congregation to worship, while simultaneously called their attention to the needs and

Figure 12

Centenary of Canonisation of St. Rita	
Liturgical Programme	
22 May 2000	
Main Celebrant:	Rt. Rev. Dr. William L. D’Mello Bishop of Karwar
Assisted by:	Fr. R. Prabhu, Provincial Karnataka Jesuit Province
1. Introduction:	In Kannada: Ms. Gracy Samuel In Konkani: Remita Samranikar Jackie Francis Birji
2. Entry Procession:	Hymn with dance: Siddi group
3. Lord Have Mercy	By the Congregation
4. Gloria	By the Congregation
5. First Reading	Judith 8: 2–8 (Gilbert Mascrenhas)
6. Responsorial Psalm	Congregation
7. Second Reading	1 Cor. 1: 26–31 (Mrs. Stella Coutinho)
8. Acclamation	Congregation
9. Gospel	Mark 3: 31–35
10. Prayers of the Faithful	Ms. Mary Fernandes
11. Offertory	Siddi Group
12. Holy Holy	Congregation

concerns of the dancers and worshippers to God. Their sense of self-worth fostered their ability to empower one another.

Following the cultural celebration on Saturday, the liturgical celebration of St. Rita on Sunday also incorporated Siddi participation. The entry processional song was sung accompanied by dance gestures by the African Indians using the following words translated from Konkani:

Yho, Saiba, yho mujhe gharan
 Come, O Lord, Come to my house
 Come to my house
 You've given me this shelter
 Come to your own house
 Teach me to keep it clean,
 The house you've given me
 Please do show me
 How to live in it
 May your word be the door (frame)
 Your justice—the lamp
 May your love be the roof
 Your affection—the nourishment
 May your sacrifice be the door
 Your meditation—the light
 May your presence be always there
 May my life be fruitful

With their song and dance, the African Indians led the congregation to perform *anjali hasta* (the bow of the head with joined hands on the forehead). This Indian gesture symbolises the total gift of oneself to God in worship. At the same time, the song and enactment gave vivid images about their living conditions and how they were seeking the presence and strength of God to live and improve their lives.

After leading the congregation with a processional song and dance, the African Indians using Konkani sang an invocational song in honour of St. Rita in the following manner:

Sanntha Rita, tum khatin kaddpache saanth. Tum amkha adhar diupache sannth.
 St. Rita, you are a saint of the impossible.
 You are a saint that helps us.
 Patron of faith, Rita St. Rita,
 Your life is of miracles
 Sprouting the dry stick
 Bring to life our lives—Rita St. Rita

You gave us the lesson of forgiveness
 You who experienced eternity through suffering
 Give us the Virtue to forgive—Rita St. Rita

You experienced God in poverty
 Gained the peace through pain of thorn
 Teach us a simple life—Rita St. Rita

During the offering, the African Indians sang and danced to the Konkani song as follows:

Vhoddliancho vhoddlo, hanv tukha kitem munn dittolo?

What shall I give you
 Oh! All powerful One?
 What shall I give you?
 The greatest thing I have
 Is the life given by you

I offer the same
 Run it the way you wish
 Everything I have, I place in your hands
 Govern it the way you wish

We've brought you the fruit of our labour
 With gratefulness in our hearts
 The harvest of your blessings, have we brought
 With gratefulness in our hearts.

Vernacularisation of the offertory phase enabled African Indian Konkani dance and music to be performed to enrich and capture common gratitude and devotion. As the offering was being brought forward to the altar, the African Indians helped to dance it toward God. By dancing the offering, Mingel Siddi said, 'the dancers and the congregation were gesturing their whole lives to God as the offering' (personal communication, 2 August 2001). The liturgical part was officiated by the Bishop and supported by the Provincial and by other priests. The African Indians, however, occupied center stage. Their Konkani was used as vernacular for the liturgy (the prescribed ritual style of worship), while their dance gestures ushered the congregation into the sanctuary, and the key phases of the worship service were marked by Siddi Konkani song and dance. The African Indians' way of honouring St. Rita was couched in the Konkani song and dance titled St. Rita, as stated above. Their gestures spoke about St. Rita as one who provides for and cares for the poor because she knew poverty. They gesticulated about St. Rita as a miracle worker who gives

new life to dry land and vegetation, and provides new meaning to their lives. As Sunil Siddi, Clara Anton Siddi and Mingel Siddi pointed out, though Siddis are like dry sticks, St. Rita intercedes for them. Also, interestingly, they believe their hardship will end. The farming imagery of sprouting dry sticks taps into the Siddi daily life of struggle and thus points to the hope they have. The virtues of St. Rita, her suffering, forgiveness, spirit and courage have become a grand metaphor for a marginalised group like the Siddis. Through liturgy, they lifted the metaphor for the congregation that included non-Christians. By their participation, they also integrated their daily struggle and expectations into the celebration of the centenary. Although they did not use words about hunting, harvesting, etc., their dance movement, the timbre of their voices and the tone and rhythm of their song and drumming were similar to those they use when they perform at cultural festivals. The church setting limited their use of hunting motifs, but the context allowed them to use the tone and rhythm borrowed from their harvest and hunting settings.

Thus as part of their striving to develop and transmit their understanding of their heritage, they expressed themselves, among other ways, through their music and dance within a Catholic ritual in honour of a Catholic Saint. Since the event drew Christians, Hindus and Muslims alike, the African Indians' participation exposed a multi-religious community to their distinctive culture. African Indians used their culture articulation during the feast to evolve strategies to cut across caste and religious barriers. The various rituals and festivals they perform in their villages are pivotal in their ongoing cultural and political articulation in Karnataka, South India. Those who take part in such ceremonials tend to link up with people of other African Indian communities thereby forming a network of translocal communities. Over the years, participation in such group events such as the feast of St. Rita has evidently accorded some members the social and political recognition that has helped them to assert some influence on their immediate societies as well as on the larger society. Examples are Imam Siddi of Yellapur, Muhammed Siddi of Manchikere, and Juje Siddi from Kirvatti. These African Indians have become spokespersons for their respective communities, mediating between their people and outsiders.

Before the group participation in festivals and rituals, African Indians had lived in their isolated communities and interacted with

other African Indians only on limited and specific occasions (personal communication with Sister Felcy, Superior of the Holy Cross Sisters, 19 July 2001). Translocal public rituals and festivals have come to symbolise and foster African Indian corporateness and their common racial bond. Such corporate practices as dances, songs and drama are performed as political and social mobilising mechanisms to unite men, women, children, religions and neighbourhoods (Cohen 1993: 16–19). Besides providing coherence to the groups, their cultural practices put on public display their creative imagination.

Although not all African Indians participate in *dammam*, *fugidi*, *zakai*, and *sigmo* dance and music, these cultural forms articulate and unite the aspirations and common identities of African Indians, a people who gather as a result of their particular and varied history as a displaced people and to elaborate on their culture and transmit some of its practices to the next generation. The Karnataka African Indians may be represented by their local leaders on the All Karnataka Siddi Development Association (Siddi Abhivraddi Society of Uttara Kannada District), but it is through the performance of their culture articulation that they are shown to be a formidable group. Siddi cultural forms tend to be a vital part of the organising system that fosters resistance against varying forms of exploitation. It is through their dance and music that the larger society comes to learn more about them. Their dance and music combined with the use of street procession and street theatre show a combination of symbols and ideologies of both African Indians and of the larger Indian society.

Before the coordinated activities through cultural forms, the African Indian communities had been marked by a few misunderstandings and the inability to unite for a common purpose. There were instances in Kirvatti and Kendelgarri where some of the young people accused the adult members of the community of embezzling funds and thus not providing good leadership. Such internal fights and mutual suspicion, according to Imam Siddi (personal communication, 13 July 2001), have been minimised since they started performing at different events, drawing greater attendance and promoting group consciousness. But by using drama, dance and music, and joining hands with Gowlis and Dalits, African Indians who used to fight alone for their livelihood against specific government agencies or rich landowners have formed new networks of support. At the moment, offi-

cials and landowners have been made aware by the collective cultural forms of African Indians who deploy their culture and identity for political action (Obeng 2000). As a displaced people, regardless of age, religion or neighbourhood, African Indians reframe their common problems of poverty, landlessness, miserable conditions, etc., and reconsolidate themselves to resist their discriminated status through music, dance and street theatre.

An important aspect of street theatre combined with Konkani music and dance is that it transforms villages, street corners, bus stands, makeshift stages and local parks into locations of struggle and resistance. It is notable that on 2 October 2000, African Indian women using dance-drama were able to stop liquor store owners from opening stores in some villages (Obeng 2000). Also, the cultural programmes do begin to create a collectivised cultural identity (Cohen 1993: 7–9) to foster African Indian consciousness, unite previously disparate groups and generate new leaders or actions besides the programmes and the leadership of the All Karnataka Siddi Improvement Association. The group identity, thus formed, is based on and expressed through their performance of distinctive African Indian Konkani music, dance, and drama that contain stories of their socio-cultural life as well as the political issues they face today (Cohen 1993).

As the African Indians express themselves through their performative identity, they wear special outfits and self-consciously sing and dance during the patronised setting. In their homes and villages, they seem to perform their dance and song in their work clothes with minimal self-consciousness. Their performative identity is an important cultural face which is further deployed to negotiate their difference and also resist any forms of ‘domesticating’ their cultural practices within some simple political, cultural or religious structures (Olaniyan 1995: 36).

In addition to African Indians expressing their multiple consciousness as Africans and Indians, and as Konkani, Marathi, Kannada, Hindi and Urdu speakers in Karnataka, their cultural activity also gives voice to their ‘ancestral agency’ (Walker 2001: 26). Sheila Walker calls attention to ways in which African ancestors are said to return and insist upon the accurate telling of their own stories to contradict stereotypes and falsehoods told about people of African descent. In Karnataka, some of the negative notions about African Indians are expressions such as

'*Siddi ka bara buddhi*' meaning 'an African Indian is not trustworthy.' Such common sayings among non-African Indians, as Prasad (1991: 229) points out, have had a damaging impact on African Indians until recently when they are correcting such false images through their cultural performances. African Indians, through group performance, are challenging false perceptions about themselves and retelling their own history by calling attention to their strengths, respectability and dignity in contrast to longtime perceptions of them as inferior people or a people without any history or culture. For example, in their select songs and dances mentioned above the African Indians stress the importance of faith and courage over doubt and fear, and the need for submission when necessary to Nature's powers. Further, they use mime, dance and songs to describe the folly of sexual dalliance, the victory over handicaps to achieve individual and collective goals, and the wisdom of protecting one's resources. Beyond what Walker rightly hints at as 'ancestral agency' among descendants of Africans, African Indians' spirit possession is a phenomenon through which their ancestors speak. Their ancestors often use some of their dancers and performers of theatre to make such utterances. On 15 June 1999, Francis Juji Siddi of Kirvatti (personal communication) discussed how his brother was possessed by an ancestor during a village theatre performance. This performance, accompanied by singing and dancing, was aimed at critiquing the exploitation of African Indians at the hands of Havig Brahmins in their local community.

Other manifestations of ancestral and other spirit possessions have occurred in different contexts. Such incidents happened during Muharram in Kendelgarri and Gunjavatti. In June 1998, an African Indian Hindu healer in Gutti (Poojari, personal communication, 15 June 1998) became possessed by his father's spirit. He disclosed that he received information about the curative herbs he used to heal his sick clients from his deceased father.

Also, Kareem Saab (personal communication, 30 May 2000), the *mulla* (Muslim religious specialist) in Gunjavatti, pointed out that during Muharram (commemoration of the tragic death of Fatima's sons Hassan and Husein) some African Indian men have been possessed by a spirit. On one occasion, a spirit instructed the community through the possessed man to renovate the local Muslim shrine. The Gunjavatti shrine was erected in honour of Mahbub al-Subhani (Abdul

Qadir al-Jilani, a Sufi mystic). According to Kareem Saab, African Indian Muslims mark the occasion with singing, dancing and processions that accompany the carrying of the *doli* or *taziya*, a model of the tomb of the martyrs Hassan and Hussain. The Muharram celebration provides an example of how African Indians' agency, music and dance are implicated in a non-Catholic religious event.

That Eric Ozario's group Mandd Subhann and the Jesuit Society of Mungod have organised activities for the African Indians to participate in does not rule out African Indian agency. Mingel Anton Siddi's Vana Kala Mela of Khodse and their African Indians were already working to create awareness and to organise African Indians through cultural activities in the Yellapur district in Karnataka. Mingel Siddi's group's activity has become part of what Walker (2001: 49) calls 'expressive culture by which individuals and societies enjoy themselves, declare their specificity and celebrate their uniqueness—through their spirituality, language, cuisine, music and dance.'

African Indians deploy their music, dance and theatre to define themselves and to present themselves to one another and to the outside world. They have been their own culture bearers and thus agents of their self-presentation as well as those who elaborate on their own self-presentation. Public cultural activities are vehicles for recording, interpreting and projecting their individual and collective aspirations. African Indians through expressive cultural forms are enhancing their image, community building, self-discovery and fostering of African Indian cultural identity. As the dancers consisting of family members, people from different religions and neighbourhoods locate themselves in cultural activities, they explore their own communities within the larger community and restructure alliances. African Indians are re-defining themselves with reference to their shared identity. Sunil Siddi and his sister Sushila Siddi, a teacher at a *balawady* (nursery school hostel) in Mainalli, used a church feast as an opportunity to display their dancing skills before their own people and other Indians. Their gestural expertise is affirmed within a church feast, thereby increasing their self-importance.

Ozario and the Jesuit Society argue that by working with the African Indians, the latter are being helped to elaborate their heritage through the Konkani culture by composing, compiling and making accessible to the larger Indian society African Indian performances.

African Indians on such occasions perform their songs and dances accompanied by choreographed gestures to enact and reenact domestic, family, work and social issues. The encoded stories and social experiences in their songs and dances provide an important context for understanding the socio-political, economic and historical circumstances under which African Indians live. African Indian cultural forms are significant systems for creating, recreating, articulating, and enhancing their social identification and cooperation within the Karnataka state (cf. Chirimini 2001: 268). Their presence and some of their skills have come to the attention of the regional and national sports authorities as a result of some of their group performances that were originally aimed simply at sharing their culture with others.

Through their performances, the African Indian groups are able to create and recreate new identities that receive recognition within the church festival and outside of it. As Mothes Siddi (one of the performers) said in a personal communication in July 2001, he and others believe that as they become aware of their rights and self-worth, they should also defend the rights of others like them. Their participation in public performances such as the centenary feast inspired self-discovery, commitment and the will to persevere, and the obligation to protect themselves and others against those who commit violence against the oppressed. Two of the young men who participated in the celebration were even inspired to intervene on behalf of a Gowli (lower caste cattle herder) student who was being molested by a Marathi teacher. The teacher comes from a caste higher than that of the student. Other participants in the cultural festival which was part of the church feast have since spoken with pride about their African Indian (Siddi) culture which they now realise they can deploy to define themselves. Sunil Siddhi, one of the young men who intervened on behalf of the student, said in an interview on 22 July 2001 that even their own family head (*kartha*) does not have the right to molest other family members. The *kartha* disciplines family members, but his actions are also held in check by the will of the rest of the family, including the *hiriyaru* (ancestors); his position does not give him license to abuse his authority. The young African Indians in this instance were making use of their intimate knowledge of the proper use of authority and combined it with their newly gained power to fight what they perceived to be injustice in the classroom.

Conclusion

The church feast in honour of the patron St. Rita in Mundgod became an important context for fostering African Indian cultural elaboration, as the elaboration engendered the liturgical renewal enshrined in Pope Paul VI's encyclical no. 22 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The Karnataka African Indians have claimed the feast of the canonisation of St. Rita as a site for dancing and singing to symbolise their unique African Indian bodies, voice, movement, and other inherited and culturally transmitted traits within a Christian celebration. The feast became the context for an African Indian self-conscious articulation of identity, hopes and frustrations. They expressed these sentiments through the theatrical intensity of their music and dance. Therefore, within the framework of the Catholic feast two sets of objectives for the St. Rita's observances have been presented here: one for the organisers to honour their patron saint, the other for the African Indians to articulate their culture, both negotiated and mediated through the performative ritual event. This essay has tried to show how the Karnataka African Indians' culture articulation provides a critical example that may stimulate further inquiry into ways in which diasporic Africans preserve aspects of their culture, make sense of their world and contribute to the religious culture of their communities.

Notes

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Aliens and Homelands

Identity, Agency and the Arts

among the Siddis of Uttara Kannada

Henry John Drewal

Introduction

This paper is the result of an exploratory study of the arts in African Diaspora communities of India where they are known as Siddis or Habshis.¹ I conducted this research in order to:

1. assess the impact of historical and cultural factors on the continuation, transformation, or disappearance of expressive cultural forms (visual and performed);
2. analyse issues of identity and agency in Afro-India using the evidence of these artistic traditions; and ultimately to
3. compare these data (especially from Goa, the former Portuguese enclave) with the artistic traditions and agency of the African Diaspora in Brazil, based on my past research there.

More specifically, I wanted to assess the impact of such complex issues as history, religion, race, ethnicity, and culture in shaping the experiences and identities of peoples of African descent in India, both past and present. Do they consider themselves Africans in a foreign land? Afro-Indians, Indians of African descent, or Indians? Muslims, Christians, or Hindus? Former slaves or former rulers? High caste, low caste, or casteless? One or more of these simultaneously? And how do the arts (visual and performed) shape, express, and reflect their sense of place, position, space, and identity? Based on research in 1967–68, one scholar (Harris 1971: 127) concluded that African descendants in India have ‘increasingly accommodated themselves to the slow and agonising process of racial and cultural oblivion.’ Now, 35 years later,

I wanted to revisit this question and, using the arts as an index, to assess whether this is the case, or whether some sense of African-ness continues to be valued and expressed, and if so, how and why.

In the nearly six months I spent in India (February-July 2001, May-June 2002), I was only able to begin to answer these complex questions and issues. It would take several lifetimes (a good thing I believe in re-incarnation!) to fathom the incredible complexity and diversity of the histories of Africans and their descendants who have resided in India (and South Asia) in significant numbers for more than a thousand years. Here I focus on one era, 17th–21st centuries, and one area that has a significant Siddi (African) population—Uttara Kannada. They number perhaps about 15,000 today, although no one really knows. In 1984, they were estimated at about 6,000 when the Karnataka state government listed them among the ‘Backward Classes’ under the category of ‘Backward Tribes’ (Prasad 1984). This region, just south and southeast of Goa on the Western (Malabar) Coast of India, is noted for the rugged Western Ghats mountain range and forests that run north-south along the coast. Here is where some Siddis fled after escaping enslavement by the Portuguese and others migrated voluntarily for land and new opportunities.

According to oral traditions and linguistic evidence (most speak Siddi-Konkani, a dialect of Konkani, the language of the coastal region between Goa and Kerala),² Siddi migrations seem to have been along the coast and then into the rugged interior, the thick forests of the Western Ghats where they carved out spaces for themselves and established a series of small, isolated, independent (yet communicating) settlements.³ The precise dates of these migrations are uncertain. Struggling to claim their place and space on the Indian land- and culture-scape, Siddis have adopted a variety of flexible strategies and tactics in order to assert their independence and agency. Agency refers to the ways and means used to turn aspirations into realities. Siddi arts (both visual and performed) are, I would maintain, an important expression of and vehicle for these ongoing efforts. This paper considers the artistic agency of one small group of Siddis in Northern Karnataka. In early May 2001, I was privileged to participate in a week-long Siddi Arts and Culture Workshop as well as a meeting of Siddi community leaders, both organised by the Loyola Vikas Kendra (LVK) in Mundgod, a Jesuit social action agency. The LVK Jesuits

have been working with the Siddis (and other marginalised groups) for more than twenty years. They began with pastoral work in the early 1980s, then educational and social work from 1986, and cultural work since 2000.

This essay considers the following matters:

1. the multi-dimensionality of identity formation,
2. the Siddi terrain—the historical and cultural contexts and complexities of Africans/Siddis in India,
3. the Siddis of Uttara Kannada,
4. the players in the LVK Arts and Culture Workshop programme of LVK,
5. the creation of performances of Siddi Identity,
6. my initial assessment of the actions, agency, accomplishments and/or failures of these efforts, and
7. a postscript on a recent political development and what the future might hold for people who find themselves in an ‘alien homeland.’⁴

Issues of Identity

Many use the concept of identity, yet few interrogate or define it precisely. To me, notions of identity are complex dialogic matters. They have to do with who one is as an individual, or as a member of some grouping (whether social, religious, political, national, economic, race, gender, class, caste, etc.). As Bakhtin suggests, we ‘constantly and intensely...oversee and apprehend the reflections of our life in the plane of consciousness of [the] other’ (Bakhtin quoted in Todorov 1984: 94). Identities are multiple, processual, internal as well as external. That is, in order to understand how Siddis see themselves and enact these visions, we also need to know what others think of them, how these thoughts are enacted in everyday life, and what impact these may have on Siddis. Agency and identity are intimately implicated in each other. By agency I mean the instrumentality of creating one’s reality—the process of turning aspirations into practices and products. Such agency never occurs in a vacuum or by accident, but rather emerges out of what already exists. It is a response to events and situations, some that open up possibilities, others that close them off. Thus, people shape culture and history, just as culture and history shape them

in complex ways. In defining others, people simultaneously define themselves.

Action (or inaction) on both sides (Siddi and non-Siddi) provokes reactions, judgments, opinions, prejudices, etc. that help to shape perceptions and future interactions. One must consider all in order to unravel issues and unveil processes and positions in complex social networks in constant flux. Thus I tried to learn what and how some Siddis felt about these matters, as well as what some Indians thought (or not) about Siddis. Both views have been instructive. Here are some of the Indian attitudes/reactions I encountered:⁵ Many did not know Siddis even existed. Those who had heard of Siddis often connected them to various government schemes to recruit Siddis for national and international sports competitions since 'they are natural athletes' having lived in the forests of Gujarat and Karnataka and 'had natural talent at running and jumping.' Others who had seen or had interactions with Siddis were of the opinion that they could not be trusted. Kiran Prasad (1984: 33) records the common saying *Siddi ka bara buddhi*, meaning a Siddi 'cannot be trusted or relied upon because he changes his mind with every suggestion coming from different people,' in other words he is regarded as 'fickle, having no mind of his own, or thoughtless' (Prasad 2002). One elderly man who had lived among the Siddis told me 'they have no culture or history, no traditions of their own.' Many higher caste Indians of lighter, 'fair' complexion see Siddis as inferior and on a level with the lowest castes and Dalits (untouchables) who are dark in complexion. They are considered 'lazy and carefree' in that they are 'not bothered to work if they have some cash in hand' and 'they do not worry about their future' (Prasad 1984: 34). In the Rajkot district of Gujarat, they are called 'Siddi Badshah, to indicate their simple carefree disposition' (Prasad 1984: 73). Others in Gujarat consider them 'low, filthy, and quarrelsome' (cf. Naik and Pandya 1993: 35), and their religious devotions are 'minimal.' In sum, the racist, casteist, and religious prejudices of some Indians have worked to denigrate, marginalise, and victimise the Siddis.

In response to such attitudes and actions, Siddis have taken various actions to avoid, counter or confront them. One is their effort to distance themselves from the larger society by establishing independent communities in the most remote areas—first in order to escape

recapture, and then to create and maintain their own cultural ways as much as possible beyond the reach of governmental control. This may have been possible to do in an earlier era (c.1600–1900), but by the 20th century this became increasingly difficult due to population pressures and expanding government policies and programmes concerning the forests that have been their refuge.

Africans in India

Africans, primarily from the northeastern and eastern coasts of Africa, have been in the South Asian region for a very long time. Some evidence suggests that the earliest presence dates to the 1st century AD when they came as merchants, traders, and sailors long before the advent of Islam (see Kenoyer and Bhan in this volume). They dispersed to various regions of Asia as part of ancient trading patterns traversing the Indian Ocean (Alpers 1967). Today, Afro-Asian communities exist in such places as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, China, as well as others. While the earliest migrant populations came freely as merchants, soldiers, and sailors, from about the second or third century it appears that some Africans were enslaved. Increasingly, they became a part of the steady and ultimately massive overseas trade in humans, conducted principally by Muslim (Omani) Arab merchants (and later Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, and others) along with other commodities such as ivory, spices, textiles, hides, and beads—a trade that continued into the 20th century. Since early medieval times (perhaps the 10th century), the majority of Africans came indirectly to India via slaving ports in Arabia and the Persian Gulf to northwestern India—Kacch, Gujarat, and the western coast to Surat, Nasik, Bombay, Janjira Island, and Goa. They also came to Calcutta in Northeastern India from ports in the Red Sea (Harris 1971: 34–35). Others can also be found in the Deccan, Hyderabad, Bihar and Pondicherry. In India they became known as Siddhis or Habshis.

The historical experiences of these Africans in India has varied greatly over the centuries. Beginning about 1200 AD, Africans, primarily from Abyssinia/Ethiopia and Somalia, served as administrators, elite royal soldiers, and bodyguards in the areas of Gujarat and the Deccan (ruled by Bahmani kings). Some rose to positions of high status and enormous political, economic, and military power (Harris

1971: 5; Sadiq Ali 1996; Chauhan 1995). These Muslim Africans built a variety of architectural monuments that survive today—forts, public buildings, mosques, palaces, waterworks, and tombs (Chauhan 1995: 246–47; Fergusson 1967). Many of their descendants consider themselves (and are recognised as) a kind of Habshi/Siddi nobility (with Afro-Arab and Muslim roots). They do not associate with the vast majority of Siddis, darker in colour (probably from eastern and central Africa), who (especially from the 17th to mid-18th century onward) were enslaved and brought to India to perform the hardest manual and menial tasks as domestics (mainly as status symbols as a form of conspicuous consumption, but also including eunuchs and concubines), sailors, dock workers, farmers, miners, cattle tenders, etc., in different parts of India. Thus historical circumstances and socio-cultural matters created very different experiences and identities for African peoples and their descendants in India.

Siddis and Others in Uttara Kannada

The Siddis of Uttara Kannada are a somewhat heterogeneous community with a generally shared history in the area of Portuguese Goa. Some may have come from other regions, but only extensive research on Siddi oral histories can confirm this. Most speak Siddi-Konkani, the coastal language of Goa. In terms of religious affiliations, 40 per cent say they are Catholic, 33 per cent are Muslim, and 27 per cent are Hindu. An important monograph on the Siddis of this area (Prasad 1984), written by the then Jesuit Priest Cyprian Lobo (now Kiran Kamal Prasad), provides a kind of baseline to assess the continuities/changes that have occurred over the last twenty years. It was prepared for the purpose of arguing and achieving Scheduled Tribe status for the Siddis, a governmental designation that would provide social, political, and monetary support—funds, elected officials, educational and economic opportunities—for the Siddis (see my postscript). Here I focus on some of those aspects of his study, as well as notes from taped conversations with Kiran Prasad in 2001–02, that are relevant to the cultural lives and identities of Siddis today.

Kiran Prasad was one of the first Jesuits to work in a systematic way with the Siddis. He adopted and enacted a policy of social activism and engagement that he had learned about while a student in Mangalore.⁶ He and other Jesuits devoted their energies to the social

and economic empowerment of the Siddhis who have been severely marginalised in India for a number of reasons. One factor is colour. Being dark, the Siddhis visually fall into those groups associated with lower castes. Along with colour, their physical features mark them as inferior according to the dominant Indian (Western-influenced?) aesthetic ideal of long straight hair, thin nose and lips. Another is their foreignness. Siddhis are outsiders, but not in the same way as Europeans. They have been resident aliens, or inside outsiders, since medieval times, who at various times sided with (and married) indigenous peoples against Europeans and other foreigners (Turks, Persians, etc). Thus they are simultaneously and ambiguously within and outside of race and caste classification systems of identity, variously ignored, co-opted, or victimised by government officials and others. Enslaved and mostly engaged in menial tasks, Siddhis are associated with low status. When they left Goa in search of freedom and independence, they chose to isolate themselves from other segments of Indian society as much as possible. Being outside the local religious, social, political and legal systems in colonial and post-colonial India, they have become victims of land-grabbing competitors (rich land owners, lumber companies, corporations, and state and national government forest reserve officials, etc.) who have taken title to their land (by legal as well as illegal means) and forced them into becoming landless contract labourers/indentured servants whose lives are not much better than during the era of slavery. Others have been forced to leave agricultural work and move to the towns and cities to find employment, usually the hardest physical labour at the lowest wages. Literacy is extremely low and it is only the present generation of Siddhis who are going to school in significant numbers. A few have reached higher education institutions in Karnataka.

Many things make it difficult for the Siddhis to act as a unified community. First, they are widely scattered in the Western Ghats in places rarely served by roads or public transportation. Some live on the western side of the mountains and experience a wetter climate and different agricultural cycle than those on the eastern/plateau side of the mountains. Thus, when some communities have time to travel and meet, others are engaged in intensive agricultural work. Communication is therefore difficult even at the best of times. Second, despite some shared beliefs and practices that may have African roots (see

Obeng this volume), religious differences divide the Siddis. Many are Catholic, but the recent inroads of Protestant missionaries (many of the evangelical/fundamentalist variety) have created divisions, rivalries, and fiefdoms among the various denominations, each vying for new converts. Muslim Siddis exist in several communities; most are Sunnis of the Hanafi School. Prasad found that they often wished to be called Muslim Siddis or simply Muslims, and in a few cases did not want to be called Siddis at all because of its pejorative connotations in the larger society (Prasad 1984: 40). The smallest percentage practise Hinduism. Some are Siddi men who have married Indian Hindu women and become part of the class/caste/religion of their wives. Others are Hindu Siddi men who have married Hindu Siddi women and some Christian Siddi women (Camara 2002). After their forced migration from Africa, Africans and their descendants in India seem to have voluntarily integrated into one of these three dominant religions as a strategy for survival, depending on the social and historical contexts of their experiences. Prasad describes their religious practices as definitely not zealous, and rather minimal. Despite official conversion to these faiths, Prasad (1984: 43) noted several shared elements in their religious practices—an emphasis on honouring ancestors, belief in spirits called *gali hodevuvudu*, ‘charms and sacrifices,’ ‘ghosts,’ trance, and the importance of music (drumming and singing) and dance in religious and social celebrations. All of these may have African roots. With their integration into Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities of worshippers, they seem to have adopted many of the prejudices of their co-religionists, and these have tended to work against the development of pan-Siddi unity/solidarity based on their racial, cultural, and historical ties to Africa.

Building Cultural/Historical Consciousness through the Arts

After many years of work with the Siddi community focused on class/economic issues which produced some limited success, the Jesuit social action priests of LVK in Mundgod, northern Karnataka, decided to focus on cultural matters. Specifically, they focused on the performing arts and hoped to accomplish a number of objectives: 1) to use the arts as expressions of identity and as a vehicle for fostering a sense of unity; 2) to develop cultural/historical consciousness; and 3) to bring the Siddi community to the attention of the larger Indian population

(and the wider society to the attention of Siddis) by furthering the development of the Siddi performance troupe that had been established in the mid-1990s by the Siddi Development Society of Yellapur (Camara 2002). In order to implement this agenda, the priests organised a Kala and Sanskriti Workshop ('Arts and Culture Workshop') and invited 25 Siddi youths (20 young men and five young women between the ages of 14–20) and five elders knowledgeable in Siddi songs, music, and dances. They also hired Eric Ozario, a well-known Konkani cultural activist, theatre director and Catholic from Mangalore, who brought an assistant (an Indian Hindu) to work on the choreography and staging of the dances. The workshop was an intensive five-day affair with several rehearsals and discussion sessions each day from 8 am to 10 pm culminating in a performance of the dances/songs for parents, priests, nuns, and some members of the Siddi and non-Siddi Indian community.

The following description of the workshop (2–6 May 2001) comes from my notes, photographs, and videos. The opening session on the first afternoon was devoted to an introduction by the priests and then the Konkani activist. Some of the major admonitions were: 'Be serious. Respect each other. You are here to work.' Then the work began with a dance/song rehearsal. The students practiced four dances, two for women and two for men. A general critique of performances followed with the assistant taking notes on staging and choreography. Then there was a break for tea, games (volleyball), and then showers. The programme resumed from 6:30–8:30 pm with the teaching of Konkani songs (one Christian and two Hindu). In a second resource session, the students practised the words and phrasing of songs to accompany the dances. When I raised a question about the teaching of Konkani and Hindu songs/dances along with the more distinctly Siddi ones (*dammam*), Eric Ozario replied that he felt Siddis should know this material in order to operate in the wider Indian society. As he explained, 'they need to know others at the same time they are learning their own traditions.' From the start of the workshop, I felt that the Siddis—both students and elders—were generally passive rather than active in shaping the workshop. They listened and responded to the organisers who, despite their best intentions, treated the Siddis as if they were 'backward' people and thus reinforced one of the very stereotypes they were attempting to change.

The second day, I was brought into the programme by the organisers who asked me to speak to the students about the history and culture of Siddis in other parts of India and the African Diaspora generally. With this move, I shifted from the traditional anthropological position of 'participant observer' (with the emphasis on 'observer') to become an 'observant and engaged participant.' I consider this move an important aspect in my practice of theory and method, one that I undertook intentionally because of my own reflections on inter-cultural research. I would suggest we re-evaluate the relationship between participation and observation in our research methods. Experiential knowledge may be crucial, especially in the understanding of expressive, sensorial culture such as the arts which are the products of processes that often must be experienced to be understood more fully. Yet observation (and theorising and interpretation) has often been privileged at the expense of bodily experience (see Clifford 1988: 31; Johnson 1987). Redressing this imbalance, I believe, will have important implications for studies of arts/cultures and those who create them. I know this from my very first research experience—a seven-month apprenticeship with a Yoruba sculptor in Nigeria. Having to learn how to carve (to acquire in-body learned techniques), to train both my body and my mind to create Yoruba cultural forms although I am not Yoruba, was a viscerally transformative experience. It gave me insights into Yoruba aesthetic principles (and through them to Yoruba cultural values generally) that I would not have had access to in any other way (see Drewal 1980). Actions often do speak louder than words.

My active engagement with the Siddis allowed me to really see and feel their concerns and issues. This was most dramatically brought home to me when I stopped speaking and asked for questions. After a short, but awkward silence, a teenage Siddi male who had avoided talking with me, raised his hand and asked two pointed, probing questions: 1) 'You know a lot about the history of Siddis, but what is your concern for them?' and 2) 'Many people come and take our pictures and then go away and we never see them or the photographs again. Why are you taking photos and what will you do with them?' These were strong, direct, challenging, and most appropriate questions and I knew my answers would either facilitate my work or stop it dead. It was about trust and intentions—about defining a new, deeper and more intimate relationship and knowing each other's positions; being pri-

marily an observer was no longer a viable option. I responded by saying that words could not answer the first, only my actions as they got to know me and made up their own minds. And as for the second, I said I would use the photographs to tell my students, colleagues, and friends about the Siddis of India and their arts. (I also resolved to get more print film and make copies of all the photos to distribute to the participants—and did this after the workshop had ended. A year later, I returned to give them copies of all my videos of their performances and to assess the situation with follow-up conversations.) The questions from the student, which revealed to me the awareness and suspicions of Siddi youth toward outsiders (whether non-Siddi Indians or foreigners), were the first evidence of the consciousness that was one of the goals of the workshop. This episode actually gave me hope for the future of the Siddis, despite the enormous odds (political, economic, social, educational, religious) against them.

Later that day I led a second session with the students, a discussion of their own goals, hopes, dreams, and aspirations, and the means by which they would achieve them. I began with a Yoruba greeting and taught them several responses. Then, after discussing something of the history of the African/Yoruba Diaspora and showing a few slides, we opened the floor for responses to my two questions, and they were marvellous. One young woman discussed how she wanted to become a writer and record Siddi stories and poetry. Another said she wanted to work on preserving Siddi language because foreign cultures (both within and outside India) were changing Siddi language and culture and they needed to preserve their own way of life. One of the young men, a Muslim, said he wanted to travel to Nigeria, learn Yoruba language and teach them Siddi language and begin an exchange programme to reconnect with other African diasporas. Another explained how he wanted to do social work within his community and establish a cultural center. Another older student and lead drummer said he wanted to produce the first Siddi CD and distribute it all over India. Others joined his suggestion saying they would be part of the music group and tour India, teaching others about Siddi culture.

Then I posed the harder question of how they would achieve these goals. Once again I was pleased with their thoughtful responses. They said they would continue in school, study Siddi language and history, form a performance group, contact a record company, etc. In sum,

this session was encouraging to me, not only because of the intelligent, thoughtful, and articulate responses, but because I was hearing for the first time during the workshop their own views, and learning rather than 'teaching.' They demonstrated clear visions for future possibilities and what it might take to realise their goals. They certainly did not seem ready to accommodate 'themselves to the slow and agonising process of racial and cultural oblivion' that Joseph Harris predicted thirty years ago. Rather, they seem to have hope for the future as Siddis, as descendants of Africans.

Performance of Siddi Identity

The performances of dances and songs to represent Siddi culture were filled with many ambiguities and complexities, like the histories of the Siddis themselves. The dances to the *dammam* drum, said to be from Africa, were the ones identified as Siddi.⁷ Some of the dances definitely contained African elements (percussive, isolated, polyrhythmic body movements, inclined 'get-down' torso posture, syncopation, improvisation, call/response). Others reflected the enormous hybridity of Siddi culture today, like the Mando, a Goan dance that combines Portuguese, Indian and African elements. Still others are from both African and Indian (more specifically Konkani) cultures, like the sigmo dance that comes from Goa and the other Portuguese enclaves of Diu and Daman. The fugadi dance is said to come from the Kunbis and Marathas of Goa (Gune 1979: 233, 263). But in the preparations for performance, a kind of Indo-British/Western aesthetic was being held up for emulation by the dance assistant who had trained at a Jesuit college in Mangalore. This aesthetic included: proscenium stage arrangements; the reordering of dance sections to heighten dramatic effect; uniformity of gestures and the elimination of improvisation; and changes in tempo for dramatic theatrical effect. Occasionally the dance assistant would consult with the Siddi elders (musicians, dancers, singers) for advice and support, but often he would not. In this effort to prepare Siddis to 'perform themselves for others,' the workshop staff worked to make these performing arts traditions more accessible and familiar to new audiences. In the process, the workshop instructors transformed them.

I am not arguing for the maintenance of some presumed 'pure,' 'authentic' Siddi dance 'tradition' which does not exist. Instead I am

highlighting the forces and processes shaping such a tradition for a specific purpose, to serve as a vehicle for Siddi agency. The intention of the organisers, with the support and acquiescence of the Siddis, was to prepare them to become a cultural/folklore troupe that could 'take their culture on the road' in order to foster a sense of pride, to make themselves more visible, less marginal, more active, more assertive in self-promotion, more sophisticated players in Indian cultural politics, and more conscious of their place and potential in the complex culture-scape of contemporary Indian society.

Successes/Failures: An Assessment

After five days of hard work, the Siddi students and elders put on a fine performance that contained evidence of their own growing confidence and sense of agency, but also raised questions about these very same matters as well. One of the young women wrote the script for the show and several students, selected by their peers, delivered a welcome statement, described the programme, and gave a vote of thanks at the end. The costumes for males (Figure 13), bright green and red outfits with turbans and skirts, had been designed by the theatre

Figure 13



Siddi students performing in Mangalore after the workshop. Note the male costumes (red skirts with green leafy shoulder and waist elements) and female costumes (green saris with green/red sash). Photograph by Peter Anton Siddi, May 2001.

director Eric Ozario with advice from a Siddi elder, but I do not know the details of this process. Father Robert Cutinha, one of the workshop organisers, told me Siddis do not have any distinctive dress like some 'tribals' in India. The female costumes were simple green saris similar to those of lower caste Indian women. One comment from a Siddi student linked the colours to their 'natural' environment, the forest. My own reaction was that this might reinforce certain negative stereotypes, rather than dispel them. There was certainly Siddi agency in this project, but was it enough to make a difference? And what kind of a difference would it make?

The workshop certainly provided a venue for encouraging cooperation among Siddis both young and old, from various scattered communities, and it served to give limited leadership roles to some of the students. It also raised cultural consciousness and pride in being Siddi, especially after the very positive response from the audience at their performance. Jesuit efforts to provide alternatives to despair, anger, and inaction are admirable. They are attempting to channel energies into productive rather than destructive directions. And the hopes and aspirations articulated by the students during my second session make me cautiously optimistic about the futures of certain Siddi youths, but worried about the future for many others.

Despite these positive aspects, I found the origins and implementation of the workshop to be generally paternalistic. The programme was conceived and organised by the Jesuits with minimal participation by members of the Siddi community. Thus the agenda was not the Siddis', yet it was executed with their support and involvement. This might be characterised as a kind of semi-agency or agency-in-training. The primary agenda of Eric Ozario, a non-Siddi Konkani activist, was to further his own ongoing efforts to use Konkani arts to foster cultural unity, survival, and consciousness. Because of their shared history and culture with the Konkani in Goa and the Malabar Coast, Siddis are a part of that cultural world. While Ozario's intentions may have been positive and useful for the Siddis in certain ways, in other ways they worked against Siddi unity and agency which are based on different historical, racial, and cultural experiences. Such a situation was perhaps unavoidable at this historical moment, but Siddis will ideally generate, conceive, organise, and lead programmes themselves in the future. Perhaps this comment falls into the same pater-

nalism I have been critiquing. But as an observant participant, I cannot avoid involvement and speaking my mind. At the same time, I tried to listen to the voices of all workshop participants, especially Siddis, for I was reminded of an important lesson from my Yoruba mentors, that the basis for learning is *iluti*—‘the ability to be quiet, listen well, and remember.’

Siddis have had limited options for action and yet they have survived despite the odds. One reason is their ability to adapt, to be flexible, improvisational in their strategies and tactics. Earlier I reported one of the prevalent negative attitudes of Indians toward the Siddis as ‘unreliable’ because they ‘change their minds with every suggestion coming from different people.’ Yet I believe this flexibility may be seen as a refined survival technique in order to ‘play’ a situation for gain rather than loss. The Indian literature on the Siddis makes frequent reference to such things as, ‘they are great imitators,’ and they ‘learn languages easily’—all of which may point to certain chameleon-like, subtle survival techniques of indirection and subterfuge rather than confrontation (cf. Scott 1985, 1990; Gates 1988). Thus we find Siddis integrating themselves into the dominant social/religious groups, whether Hindus (their landlords and neighbours), Muslims (former masters), or Christians (former masters and missionaries), and associating themselves with other NGOs in order to take advantage of funds and programmes.

But ‘going along’ to ‘get along’ has never been their only choice. They have also demonstrated extraordinary courage, will, and endurance in fleeing bondage and literally carving out new lives of freedom and independence for themselves in the harsh and dangerous environment of the forests of the Western Ghats in places no one else was willing to tame until recently. There they established small, self-governing settlements and farms, and continued their hunting traditions in order to survive. The parallels with the independent communities (*quilombos*) of Africans in Brazil in the 17th century (many still surviving today) are remarkable.⁸

Now, as the forests dwindle and population pressures bring more and more people in search of land, and the government exercises ever more control over remaining forest reserves (and aids in its destruction with corrupt practices), Siddis have fewer and fewer places to hide and thrive. Increasingly, Siddis are being robbed of their culti-

vated land (since they never claimed legal title to it) and forced to become wage labourers for rapacious landlords in the rural areas, or day labourers for bosses in the towns and cities. Forcibly removed from Africa and then deprived of much of their cultural memory and historical roots as African descendants in India, Siddis have a long and hard journey ahead of them. Sometime after the workshop ended, Eric Ozario asked me to comment on a publication he had written to energise Konkani communities worldwide and to promote his projects. What I wrote to him I would say even more strongly to Siddis: As part of a largely involuntary global African diaspora with limited resources, powers, and options, Siddis should see their survival of horrific trans-oceanic journeys as well as dislocations in India as evidence of extraordinary strength and perseverance. They possess the ability to imagine and to create culture anew. Their movements have known no limits, so the same should hold true for their visions of possibilities, their aspirations for the future—like those of the Siddi students at the workshop. To begin that monumental journey, they should explore their sources and resources (their past) in order to deal with the present and future. As Yoruba say, ‘A river that forgets its source, dries up.’

As a diaspora, they are certainly scattered, living in an alien homeland. But ‘diaspora’ also connotes the act of planting, of sowing. Siddis are sowers of something new. So far the initiatives have come primarily from those allies who support and assist them—Jesuits and a Konkani activist. Their allies have been their spokespersons, not their own nascent leadership. Attempts by the Siddis to organise themselves have often ended in failure due to either internal divisions or negative outside forces. Ideally, Siddis will find their own voices, articulate their own concerns, determine their own priorities, and take action. Their silence and reticence distance them from others, exoticising them in the eyes of other Indians. For example, when one of the Siddi students spoke Konkani during a performance in Mangalore a few weeks after the workshop, a non-Siddi audience member was very surprised that he could! She must have thought he would speak ‘African’ or ‘Siddese’! Friends, allies, patrons, mentors, well-wishers, supporters and observant participants should speak less, listen more, step aside, and learn what Siddis consider to be their most pressing problems and potential answers. Performing Siddi culture is fine, as

long as it is not 'Siddis on Display' but Siddis who speak about and perform aspects of their history and culture for their own political purposes and empowerment in contemporary India.

Postscript

Eighteen years after Kiran Prasad published his 1984 monograph arguing for Scheduled Tribe status for Siddis in Karnataka, his vision has been achieved. In an important decision, the Indian central government enacted legislation that added Siddis (along with about fifteen other groups) to the national list of Scheduled Tribes. The President of India signed the bill into law on 14 June 2002. Such legislation gives the Siddis certain special rights and opportunities. Now the challenge will be for Siddis to develop strategies and tactics to claim them in order to turn their aspirations into concrete realities. I wish them every success.

Notes

1. I wish to acknowledge generous support from the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) for its grant which enabled me to begin this exploration of the history, culture, and arts of the African diaspora in India; the University of Wisconsin, Madison Graduate School for a faculty research grant and the College of Letters and Sciences for a sabbatical research leave. My sincere thanks to the staff of the AIIS in New Delhi for all their help, and very special thanks to the staff of the Loyola Vikas Kendra, Mundgod, especially Frs. Robert Cutinha and Francis Guntipilly, the Sisters at Mainalli, and Eric Ozario, but most of all to my new Siddi friends for all their kindnesses and hospitality during my visits in their communities. Thanks also to the editors of this volume and Charles Camara for their perceptive and helpful comments, questions, and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. Many of my respondents said they spoke Siddi-Konkani, a dialect of Konkani. Linguistic research is needed to determine the nature of this dialect, whether it contains any African elements, and if so, what these might be.
3. Interviews with Siddi elders in Uttara Kannada, 2001–02.
4. This is taken from the title of a 1983 documentary film about the Siddis of the Gir forest and produced for the Ministry of Culture, the State of Gujarat.
5. This survey of attitudes is admittedly random and informal. I gathered impressions and took notes from my daily conversations with non-Siddis and Siddis (of different classes, castes, and religions) in different parts of India, as well as Indian writings about Siddis—newspapers, books, articles, and Prasad 1984. A wider, more systematic survey would be needed to check these preliminary findings.

6. In 1978, Kiran Prasad and Francis Guntipilly were part of a student group that argued for 'contextualised theology,' that is, liberation theology adapted to the specifics of contemporary Indian issues and problems. They developed a curriculum that included two years of theoretical ministry followed by two years of contextualised social action work. Loyola Vikas Kendras (LVKs) in different states became the sites for social action/justice work based on the Indian contextualised theology model. Between 1981–83, Kiran Prasad worked at the LVK in Mundgod and produced his 1984 report on the Siddis.
7. The *dammam* drum and dances are thought to be similar to the *dammal* dances of Muslim Sidis of Gujarat and Diu. (See *Siddis of Gujarat* 1993: 29–30.)
8. See Drewal 2000; see also Price 1996 for a broad survey of this history.

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Sidis and Parsis

A Filmmaker's Notes

Beheroze Shroff

January 2000

In a densely populated industrial section of Bombay, tucked behind the hustle and bustle of markets and shops in a congested by-lane, sits a Gori Pir *chilla*, a memorial built to Gori Pir, the ancestral saint of the Sidis. In 1947, a cyclone destroyed the original *chilla* or memorial shrine and it was rebuilt by a Parsi man whose family lives in Bombay. The narrow lane is barely big enough to allow two rickshaws to brush each other and get through. My rickshaw trundles through the lane, past the open vegetable bazaar, the grocer's shop, the STD phone booth, a cloth shop, a tailor's shop, a tea shop and on through the gate, into a compound. People here often mistakenly refer to the *chilla* as *dargah*, or tomb.

As my rickshaw comes closer to the *chilla* I hear the chanting, 'Gor, Gor, Gori Pir' accompanied by drum beats. A group of thirty African Indian/Sidis, men, women and children, dance in a circle, doing the *goma* dance which is also called *dammal* by the Sidis. Some of them look recognisably African, whereas others could blend into the Indians around them.

Today is the day of the Gori Pir *sandal* or *urs*, the death anniversary of Gori Pir, celebrated as the day for venerating Gori Pir and Mai Mishra. However, today I have come here as a filmmaker, a visual anthropologist who wants to explore on film a subject little known to the outside world—Gori Pir, the ancestral saint of the African Indian/Sidi community of Gujarat. Most importantly, I will explore the legacy of the Sidi ancestral saint Gori Pir for my family and for the small

group of people here today, the majority of whom are Parsis, who are devotees of Gori Pir and live here in Bombay. As a Parsi devotee of Gori Pir, I have known and experienced this ceremony and ritual nearly all of my life. And for the last 43 years, I have come here with my family to pay my respects to the Sidi saints Gori Pir and his sister Mai Mishra.

Now, as a filmmaker, I watch with my camera crew. My mind concentrates on lighting, camera angles, and sound. This is different from my usual routine at the *chilla*, where as an active participant in the ceremony of Gori Pir I would be making several preliminary preparations, like helping my mother sort out the *chaddars* (flower shawls), *attar* (perfume) bottles, and incense brought as offerings for the rituals to honour Mai Mishra and Gori Pir.

Through the camera lens the experience is mediated for an audience out there, for a market, for film festivals, for academics, for distribution, for sales—the whole gamut of the media through which the Sidis will be processed and consumed. On the one hand, I feel excitement that I will put on film the energy of this mystical experience, but on the other, I experience a distance, a guardedness and an ambivalence. For one thing, spiritual, mystical experience is private, intimate and visceral. How can I convey what the Sidi *goma/dammal* dance means to the Sidis themselves, to me, to my family and to the other devotees here today? Many other questions have to be addressed: Who is Gori Pir and what does he mean to the Sidis and to the Parsi devotees here at a *chilla* in Bombay, about 250 miles away from what is considered to be the original tomb or *dargah* of Gori Pir in Gujarat state? Finally the question of representation stands before me. I have the responsibility to represent the Sidi point of view or perhaps several Sidi points of view, and that in itself is slippery terrain with different implications, especially vis-à-vis my position as a Western educated, middle-class Parsi woman. In this essay, I start with the Parsi part of this journey, this exploration, and introduce my father and family as Parsi devotees of Gori Pir.

Flashback: 1957–59

My father drives his 'six horse power' grey Austin car through a narrow bylane, off the highway. My sisters and I are seated in the back, my mother in front. There is open land on all sides, with just a few

homes and none of the bustle of the present-day market and shops exists. My father's car is one of the few cars to go down this lane. As we turn into a large compound, I hear vigorous drum beats and intense activity at the Gori Pir *chilla*. Sidi men, women and children are dancing in a circle formation around the Gori Pir *chilla* and chanting in rhythm to the pulsating beat of the drum.

In charge of the ceremonies is Sheikh Makbul, a Sunni Muslim, a spirit medium for Gori Pir, the man who became a lifelong spiritual mentor to both my parents. Referred to as Makbul Bava, Sheikh Makbul was respected among Sidis in Gujarat and in Bombay as the spirit medium for Gori Pir. He was a tall man with a ramrod straight back, a volatile temperament and incredible charisma. What brought my father and about 200 Parsis to Gori Pir and the Sidis of Gujarat? In 1957, how did my father, a westernised Parsi, a civil engineer by training, end up at this *chilla* of the Sidi saint Gori Pir, in Bombay, a space frequented by Muslims, Hindus and other Parsis? In order to answer this question, it would be productive to briefly glance at Parsi history in India and analyse the position of Parsis as a minority in India.

Parsis: Persian Roots, Indian Identity

Following the Arab invasion of Persia in 651 AD, in about the 7th or 8th century, Parsis, also known as Zoroastrians fled their homeland and sought refuge in India. Parsis first settled in the coastal region of Sanjan in Gujarat¹ (Nanavutty 1977: 41). From about the 10th century, Parsis settled in other nearby areas of Gujarat like 'Vankaner, Broach, Variav, Ankleswar, Cambay and Nausari'² (Kulke 1974: 29), where they worked on the land or were weavers by profession (Luhmann 1996: 79). Although the Parsis maintained a separate religious practice, they assimilated into Gujarati culture, especially in terms of language and social customs.

However, with the coming of the British to India, the Parsis changed from being a rural based community to becoming a rapidly urbanised one. They first moved to the port city of Surat, which was important to both the Mughals and the English, and played a crucial role in developing the trade and commerce of this important city. Later, seeking new opportunities in the expanding British enterprises, Parsis moved to Bombay (Luhmann 1996: 83–84). Scholars of Parsi history have examined in detail the extensive role played by some promi-

ment Parsis in the development of trade and commerce and other institutions of the city of Bombay, especially banks, educational institutions and hospitals. It was these Parsis who contributed a distinctive Parsi presence to the political economy of the city (Luhmann 1996: 90).

Eckehard Kulke (1974: 108) analyses the process of urbanisation and westernisation among the Parsis and the consequent social tensions and displacements in these terms:

The process of extensive anglicisation took place on the material basis of economic prosperity, which temporarily also made it possible for the Parsee middle classes between 1880 and 1920 to satisfy their westernised consumption habits. As early as 1880, however, Parsee critics are repeatedly calling attention to...the ever expanding socio-cultural discrepancy between orthodox, rural Parsees under Hindu influences and westernised, urban Parsees, as well as of a general socio-cultural uprooting.

Kulke (1974: 111) also comments on the complex nature of the Parsi socio-cultural identification with the British and with Western ideas of progress, as a result of which some Parsis acquired a sense of purpose and engaged with social reforms among Hindus and Muslims: 'The consciousness of they themselves being Indians but, on the other side, of their directly sharing in the "burden" of the British mission in India promoted a feeling of responsibility for the development of the whole Indian society among the Parsee reformers.'

According to T.M. Luhmann (1996: 21, 64), the sense of purpose as agents of social change that the Parsis experienced during the time of the British was transformed into a sense of loss after the end of British rule in India:

The Parsi experience of Independence was an experience of loss, no matter how much joy and optimism they found in freedom. As the British were forced out of India, the Parsis however complicated their own emotional responses to the coloniser might have been, gave up the measure of goodness which was associated with the community's hour of greatness. ...many Parsis today are angrily embarrassed at their colonial complicity and their colonial nostalgia.

...what they remember are their achievements: their power and ambition during the British Raj, their greatness in the Persian past... Large chunks of undistinguished yesterdays—for instance, the first eight hundred [years] the Parsis spent in India—are ignored... The reconstructed past now provides an important and valuable sense of capability. But it contains a destructive edge, for the construction of memory during the

Raj served a purpose which is no longer relevant for the Parsis in modern India...

I could with some degree of certainty say that my father did not escape the British identified Parsi ethos, despite the fact that there were many in his generation who supported Gandhi's calls for *swaraj* home rule.

The sense of loss experienced by the Parsis was perhaps complicated by several factors. Lurhmann points out that as a community the British-identified Parsis perhaps felt without direction and could not really see themselves as playing a role which they did during the time of the British. Perhaps they felt marginalised in Hindu-dominated India and felt the need to re-invent themselves once again—first after coming as refugees from Persia, next as colonial subjects of the British Raj and now as subjects of a newly independent India. In their effort to reassert a Zoroastrian identity, they may have faced difficulties and perhaps some alienation.

One element which contributed to the Parsi community's alienation is pointed out by scholar Piloo Nanavutty (1977: 172), who writes that the Parsis felt a lack of confidence in their apex leadership body, the Parsi Panchayat, which had become a clique of well heeled Parsi patriarchs, rather than a representative Parsi governing body. This lack of leadership and direction may have contributed largely to other feelings of disaffection. Lurhmann (1996: 197) usefully analyses the Parsi community's feelings of displacement and loss and consequent search for healing:

This is perhaps the work of culture, to heal our suffering through means we cannot recognise directly as a healing. In the postcolonial idiom this healing seems to take the form of consciously chosen multiple identities which the subject ironically plays with and sets up against the dominant construction of his marginal identity as a means to transcend the pain of inherent difference.

The word 'healing' significantly connects me to the question of how and why a Sidi saint Gori Pir and the Sidis of Gujarat intersect with the Parsi community's need to heal their fragmented sense of self and the psychological and spiritual feelings of loss that it entails.

I think in turning to the Sidi saint Gori Pir, through his medium Makbul Bawa, my father found a meaningful space for healing. The rituals and ceremonies surrounding the veneration of Gori Pir intro-

duced my father to a form of congregational worship with a family of followers. As the medium of Gori Pir, Makbul Bava created a one-on-one bonding with the Gori Pir devotees by holding regular meetings at the *chilla*. The group worship of the *chilla* contrasted with the practice of Zoroastrianism which stressed a more individual, solitary worship. Luhrmann (1996: 36–37) describes the very private nature of Zoroastrian worship in the fire temple and at home:

Zoroastrianism is a solitary religion. The religious Parsi—despite their westernisation—has as his or her main responsibility the recitation of prayers in the ancient tongues, Avestan or Pahlavi... One can pray either at home or at the fire temple... Zoroastrian prayer in Bombay is a private, hidden activity. There are occasional public rituals, for lifecycle events or even just thanksgiving (the Jashan)...³

Anthropologist Helene Basu takes the relationship between Parsis and Sidis back to the 19th century during the time of the British in India. So, historically the Parsi-Sidi connection is an old one. Basu (1993: 292–93) points out that after the abolition of slavery in 1840s, the British patrolled the Indian Ocean area to catch slave ships:

Slaves who were discovered on board were transported to Bombay or Surat. There they were freed and left to themselves. While the British colonial regime employed some of the former slaves in the military or police, most of them served the native elite as domestic servants. The Gazetteer of 1899 reports the arrival of a small group of Siddi in Surat who were later employed as servants by 'Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Parsi masters.'

Surat, as I mentioned earlier, was the hub of Parsi settlement from the 17th century. So Parsis were in contact with Sidis and perhaps even then were familiar with the cult of Gori Pir, as Basu (2001: 271) indicates:

Many of the cult followers are or had been in the past employees of the Sidi (*sheth*). They often belong to other Muslim castes such as Bohra or Memmon or even Parsis. Thus often the same people who provide ordinary employment for the Sidis are also the ones who seek their ritual services in times of personal crisis. It is then that roles are reversed and the Sidi assume ritual authority over those who are their superiors in other contexts.

One could perhaps trace other points of contact that the Parsis may have had in the past, long before the establishment of the *chilla* in Bombay in the 1940s.

The Healing Arts of the Sidis

The cultural group which brings the 'primordiality' related to shared myths, memories, values and symbols to the fore, thus assumes a vital healing function. One of its most important aspects is to replace feelings of loss with those of love (Sudhir Kakar 1996: 148).

In Parsi culture, the need to talk to a psychiatrist or a therapist is highly frowned upon; in fact, such a concept was totally alien to my family. The concept of a *guru* or a teacher was not as alienating. In independent India (in the 1950s), as a young engineer between jobs in a fiercely competitive construction market, my father had to wait out long periods without work. This personal struggle may have added to the general feelings of rootlessness within the Parsi community that I discussed earlier. At this critical time in his life, my father discovered Sheikh Makbul, and through him a space to process personal grief and anxieties with a loving spiritual guidance.

In his role as a medium, Sheikh Makbul would talk individually to each and every person who had come to see him with their problems. The *chilla* of Gori Pir provided devotees a collective space to process their pain. At the *chilla*, not only did Makbul Bava energise the disaffected and the ailing, but also the whole atmosphere was convival. As followers, devotees seeking succour and sustenance from Gori Pir, we all became family.

What Helene Basu describes as the establishment of the ritual bond between the Sidis applies to the bonds and relationship that non-Muslim devotees experience and understand in relation to the Sidis, and especially to the medium of Gori Pir, in their role as 'spiritual seekers': 'Initiation into the Sidi *fakir*-brotherhood... is embedded in the special relationship between a spiritual seeker in the position of the child (*balak*) and a spiritual Sidi "master-*fakir*" in the position of parent and teacher (*murshid*)' (Basu 2001: 267).

Under the tutelage of the medium, as a devotee of Gori Pir anyone was welcomed into the group. Gori Pir, through his medium, refers to the 'spiritual seeker' as *nadan* or innocent one and sometimes women are referred to as *mai* or mother. The medium often refers to himself as *fakir*. As a child, I quickly learned how to respectfully approach the medium—for example the devotee has to hold the hand of the medium with the greeting *salam*, before she talks. I have often been asked, '*kya shikayat hai mai?*' 'What complaint do you have?' The *makandar* or

assistant/interpreter plays a crucial role for the medium. He holds one hand of the medium throughout the *baithak* or session. He is well versed in all matters and the medium relies on him to follow through his instructions to the devotees or to explain rituals, etc., to the devotee.

From my childhood, I got accustomed to attending regular *baithak* or sessions with the medium, at the *chilla* of Gori Pir. As a child, I felt as though I were talking to a wise old man, more like a grandfather. As I grew older, I experienced something akin to talking to a therapist or a counsellor. Of course, when I was younger, several petitions went to Gori Pir and Mai Mishra to help me through difficult exams. I was told in no uncertain terms to work hard and leave the rest to God.

At this time, I was introduced to Kamar Badshah Sidi, who was regularly invited by Makbul Bava to Bombay from Gujarat to sing *qawwalis*—devotional songs to Gori Pir, on special occasions like the Gori Pir *sandal* and Mai Mishra *ghat*, both of which are annual ceremonies that honour the saints. Badshah's songs—loving paens to Gori Pir—reinforced the concept of love between Gori Pir and his devotees. Many of the songs were Badshah's own compositions, where he directly addressed devotees of Gori Pir, reminding them of Gori Pir's kindness and benevolence and his intervention on behalf of the devotees in the *darbar* (court) of Allah. Often, as a child, bathed in the poetry of Badshah's words and soothed by his deep baritone voice, I fell asleep as did other children, because the *mehfil* (festivities) would continue throughout the night in Sheikh Makbul's days.

Makbul Bava also invited a large group of Sidi men, women and children from Bombay to perform the ritual *dammal goma* dance which is so crucial to the ceremonies and rituals venerating Gori Pir, Mai Mishra and the other saints in Gori Pir's retinue like Sher Shah Bava or Usmanshah Bava. Basu (1993: 292) explains that: 'Today, *goma* dancing is considered to be a gift which the Siddi have received from the saints defining essential activities of Siddi *fakirs*. This is manifested especially at the saint's day (*urs*) of Gori Pir when large numbers of Siddi are collectively possessed by the saints.'

At the Bombay *chilla*, Badshah and the other Sidis symbolically represent the presence of Gori Pir at the Gori Pir *urs/sandal* and Mai Mishra *urs/ghat*. In fact the ceremonies are never held without the presence of the Sidi *dammalis*.

Makbul Bava took the *baithak* sessions almost every Thursday at the Gori Pir *chilla* in Bombay. It was his practice to pray and as he prayed, the force of the possession made him fall to the ground. Two attendants or *makandars* would hold him and lay him down gently. On special occasions, when Badshah sang and the Sidis performed the *dammal* dance, Makbul Bava would stand up while still possessed by Gori Pir. He would wave his hand to the rhythm and move his feet, responding to the words and to the rhythm. In response, Badshah would get even more energy and sing with more gusto. Devotees would shower Badshah with money; some would hand the money to Makbul Bava who would call Badshah to him and give him the money with words of blessings. Badshah and another singer Vasanti *behn* (sister) often sang:

Tu phir mang, phir mang Khwaja se phir mang,

Phir mang, phir mang Chisti se phir mang...

Tu bichaye rosee kee jalee

To khuda ke kasam, tu na kabhi jayega khalee

Ask Khwaja again and again (for help)

Ask Chisti again and once again

If you bring a shawl of roses to Him

Then in the name of God you will never leave empty-handed.

My father learned more about Gori Pir than anyone in our family because he went to the *chilla* regularly, often attending overnight prayer sessions. Sometimes, these sessions were devoted to spiritual questions only—the personal questions were retained for the weekly *baithak* sessions. According to my father, at one of these nightly prayer sessions, Makbul Bava, as the medium of Gori Pir revealed Gori Pir's identity as *gulam khandan*, 'descended from slaves.'

At the prayer meetings, devotees were required to stay up all night and recite prayers. The Parsi devotees recited their own prayers. Often Gori Pir speaking through his medium gave his devotees sequences of *kalmas*, special prayers from the Qur'an, as *bakshish*, a gift to bring blessings, *barkat*, into their lives. My father often found himself staying up late to finish his Zoroastrian daily prayers and the *kalmas* given by Gori Pir that he had undertaken to pray. Some of the *kalmas* were passed on to his family.

Makbul Bava visited my family once a week and on those days often accompanied my father to his work sites. I realise that for my

father, through the medium Makbul Bava, Gori Pir became a close companion. For my father, Makbul Bava and Gori Pir were inseparable entities. My father found in the spirit medium of Gori Pir a therapist, a spiritual consultant, and an elder member of the family. To friends who visited my home, my father introduced Makbul Bava as his *guru*, a Hindi word that only partially explained the myriad and complex roles played by Gori Pir in my father's life.

Not everyone could handle the intensity of the relationship with Gori Pir through his spirit medium Makbul Bava. Makbul Bava would give my father and my mother and a few select people several responsibilities in terms of organising the rituals and ceremonies at the *chilla*. Difficult as the responsibilities were, they represented the responsibilities of the devotee in the relationship with Gori Pir. My parents, however, passed on the intense relationship to their children and grandchildren. Makbul Bava participated very closely with my family. My parents invited him to the Parsi New Year and other festivities at home. They interpreted the presence of Makbul Bava as the protective presence of Gori Pir in their home. My parents believed that the realm of the spirits and souls co-existed closely with the material world. The spirits of Gori Pir and Mai Mishra could be invited in time present, by flowers and incense and devotional songs or the *goma* dance and the devotees were invited to interact with the spirits.

Parsi devotees went sometimes to Gujarat accompanied by Makbul Bava to interact with Gori Pir on his premises. My father explained that those who went to Gujarat had been 'called there' by Gori Pir. In the 1950s and the 1960s the Gori Pir *dargah* was a quiet place where a few devotees came seeking assistance. Now the place draws hundreds of devotees, especially on Thursdays, *jumme rat*.

Sheikh Makbul was a medium or a shaman for Gori Pir who had been trained and initiated from childhood to become a spiritual guide and healer. Sheikh Makbul passed away in 1984. At this time, Makbul Bava's grandson Yasin was the *gaddi varas* or designated heir to the position of medium. When Makbul Bava died Yasin was in his teens, and although trained and initiated to inherit the responsibility of a medium for Gori Pir, he was inexperienced. So Yasin's father, Sheikh Hussain, who was Makbul Bava's son-in-law, stepped in to take over as the medium for a temporary period. Today Yasin is the medium for Gori Pir at the Bombay *chilla*.

My Search for Gori Pir: Flashback 1980s

Gori Pir village in the 1980s is a small dusty village where about 300 Sidis live. The Sidi homes are made of thatched roofs and mud floors and walls. From here, the way to the Gori Pir *dargah* is a steep climb by way of a narrow footpath. In the rainy season, when some of the top soil is washed off, on the footpath to the Gori Pir *dargah* you can find the agate nodules from which the famous agate beads of Gujarat are made.

My parents, my sisters and I go to meet Badshah at his house. Badshah welcomes us with his usual warmth and hospitality. We sit inside Badshah's house on steel chairs kept especially for visitors. The inside is one big room that serves as a living room and bedroom for the family. In the back is a small kitchen with a wood stove on which Badshah's daughter is preparing tea.

Badshah puts in my hand a little monograph entitled *Indian Agate Beads* (Francis 1982). Badshah also informs me that a young German scholar by the name of Helene Basu is writing a book about the Sidis. He gives me Helene's address in Germany and asks me to write to her. Here is a scholarly contact coming to me from the Sidi community's poet.

On this visit I see the community for the first time with the eyes of a filmmaker. I correspond with Helene Basu who generously shares her ideas and sends me a bibliography of material on Sidis. An outline of a film on the Sidis takes shape before my eyes. I know that as a devotee I have access to the Sidi community, but I know I also have some major responsibilities here. I know that filmmakers can often come into different areas with their cameras and tape recorders and interrupt people's lives. I also realise the race and class implications of my position vis-à-vis the Sidi community. As a middle class Parsi woman and filmmaker, the asymmetries of power in this situation are clearly something I have to acknowledge. As devotees my parents and family had been completely accepted by the Sidis. However, in my role as a devotee I am to an extent a supplicant and the relationship is one of supposed equality between the Sidis and myself. Now as a filmmaker, I would be in control, in charge and I would frame the Sidis according to my needs as a filmmaker. The insider/outsider dynamic which was anyway a rather delicate one was certainly going to be more defined. I was faced with a difficult question as to how to enter this

space as a filmmaker and how I would represent the Sidis who at present have some urgent issues confronting them.

Mutual Dilemmas

The Parsi devotees and the Gori Pir *chilla* in Bombay help to define the spritual and social meaning of Gori Pir for Parsis and other communities among the thousands of devotees who visit the shrine in Gujarat. But what about the complexities surrounding the lives of the Sidis today, their economic hardships, their struggle to survive in an increasingly modern and religiously fundamentalist India?

The Sidis claim a history in India with the coming of Gori Pir, their ancestral saint from Africa. Gori Pir is an important rallying point for the Sidis, especially since the *Sidis* are a dispersed population in India, from various different regions in Africa. Edward Alpers (1997), Helene Basu (2001) and Fitzroy Andre Baptiste (1998), in their studies on the Sidis and the slave trade in India, indicate the vast diversity of African populations that were brought to the Indian subcontinent. In a recent essay, Basu (2001: 271) writes:

Along with the historical shifts of the centers of the slave trade, the areas from which slaves were drawn in Africa also changed. While in the 14th and 15th centuries Ethiopian slaves dominated the slave trade, in later centuries the recruitment areas were increasingly shifted further South. The last wave of slave immigrants probably stemmed mostly from areas of present-day Tanzania and Mozambique. Thus there is no continuous genealogical link discernable between the existence of Habshi in different historical contexts in India and the present Sidi *jamat* in Gujarat.

Through the legend of Gori Pir, the Sidis have crafted a social and historical identity in India. In early video interviews (1990) that I recorded in Gujarat, Badshah retells the legend of Gori Pir who was sent from Africa on a mission to India. In this retelling of Sidi oral history, Gori Pir was called from Africa to confront evil, black magic practitioners. By the sheer strength of his spiritual force, he was able to overpower those evil spirits and create peace and harmony in the land. Badshah explains the crucial role played by Mai Mishra and Bava Abbas, the sister and brother of Gori Pir, in this confrontation of Good and Evil.

In terms of identity, this legend reconstructs the Sidi concept of 'home', their origin in Africa and their sense of 'belonging' and pur-

pose in their adopted home, India. The story links African lives to India and Indian history. The myth of Gori Pir empowers the Sidis and gives them a dignity by which they reclaim their rightful place in the history of this region of Gujarat, where the official discourse has no place for them except as a marginalised people. According to Helene Basu (2001: 265) the legend of Gori Pir signifies several levels of meaning for the Sidis, mainly the link to the past history of Africans in India:

Thus, the saint Gori Pir has become a polysemic symbol referring to at least three levels of meaning: 1) as Gori Pir is depicted as a military leader... the saint invokes the memory of historical and aristocratic Habshi... 2) as a Sufi master Gori Pir stands for an important social tie that connects the Sidi collectively with the wider society in Gujarat; and 3) he also invokes a social universe constructed by ties of kinship between the Sidi as a group of African-Gujaratis.

Historians, anthropologists and sociologists speculate that Gori Pir was a merchant and a holy man who was responsible for many innovations in the agate bead industry in Gujarat. There are various theories about when Gori Pir came to Gujarat and where he established the agate bead industry. The scholar Peter Francis (1982: 26–27) speculates that Gori Pir symbolises the transfer of the bead industry from Hindu into Muslim hands. Helene Basu (2001: 9) points out that there are many shrines to Gori Pir from Sind through Kacch and all over the Gujarat landscape which point to Gori Pir's considerable historical and contemporary significance in this area.

While the legend of Gori Pir importantly links the Sidi community to its origin in Africa, my task as an anthropologist/filmmaker is a delicate one. Most importantly, I have to be careful not to exoticise the Sidis as foreign or as foreigners. They are very much part of India and have an Indian identity. In one of my video interviews (March 2000), a young Sidi man, Mohammed, who makes a living as a bus driver between Baroda and Bhavnagar makes the following statement:

We are Indian and African—you see, Indian people call us African and we say that we are Indian. Our way of life, our customs, right now are Indian, right? Not of Africa, over there, right? Whatever way of life and customs and relatives we have are all in India. We don't have any concern with Africa.

A parallel situation with respect to identity exists among the Mexican *moreno*, i.e. the Afromexican community of San Nicolas, Mexico. Laura Lewis (2000: 898) examines how the *morenos* privilege their

Indian (i.e. American Indian) ancestry over their black heritage:

Such experiences and identities are informed by 'national-popular' paradigms that have glorified Indianness while relegating blackness to the nation's margins, and by *morenos*' own takes on cultural difference and Africanity, which for now they mostly do not engage because such attributes do not coincide with their self-perceptions or improve their material conditions.

Lewis' analysis helps us to understand Mohammed's statements, which reflect a certain ambivalence among Sidis towards issues of identity. Like the *Afromexicans* studied by Lewis, Mohammed sees himself as the subject of a history within a contemporary social and political context. For example, even with the question of cultural representation, when Sidis perform their traditional *goma* dance for visitors, they wear an 'African' dress with peacock feathers. The Sidis are self conscious about the constructedness of their identity as 'African dancers,' as we can see from Mohammed's comments on this matter (March 2000):

...for us these peacock feathers, this dress, we don't really wear this dress... Actually we gave our programmes in our regular clothes. This peacock feathers dress that we wear...some artist who lives in Udaipur, he showed us this costume and asked us to perform in these national programmes (i.e. Festival of India or Mela). Meaning when these big-shot ministers come and visit, we are asked to perform before them. For these programmes we are paid 100–150 rupees (i.e. \$4 or \$5) per day that's it...

Although the Sidis perform their *goma* dance for visitors dressed in their peacock feather costumes, they feel that this representation is created for them by 'cultural promoters' as exotic African dancers and drummers and this identity has been taken out of their context of the *dargah* where they perform their *goma* dance to venerate their saints. In my interview with Mohammed (March 2000) he specifically noted that:

We used to wear our regular clothes in which we performed our programs... we were performing a service to Dada (Gori Pir). But these people took us with them saying, 'come with us and perform outside the village... we'll start a salary—a means of earning a livelihood for you...'

Helene Basu (1993: 297 and in this volume) has documented in detail the function of the *goma/dammal* dance in the *dargah* veneration rituals of the Sidis, in which the *dammal* dance invokes the presence of the Sidi ancestors. I have filmed the *dammal* dance as performed

by *Sidis* in Bombay for the Gori Pir *urs* performed at the Parsi *chilla* in Bombay, where the Sidis perform in their regular clothes as part of the ceremony to invoke the saints. The footage documents the energetic and ecstatic response of the spirit medium of Gori Pir to the vigorous drumming of the *dammal* dancers. The footage demonstrates how integral the role of the *dammal* dance is in the sacred trance/possession ritual of the Sidis.

Mohammed (March 2000) reiterates how the peacock feathers costume was designed by an outsider who is

...in the government. He's a dance artist manager of some sort and he comes here. He has an office in Udaipur called the West Zone Culture Center. Over there he has other officers above him. He takes us when these high-up ministers meet. These people take our dances, have us perform, for entertainment, that's all; from that we get 100–150 rupees.

There's nothing else in it for us. They never tell us that we'll give you jobs or any such thing...they just come and take our dance for a program (event), for pleasure...for whose ego they take it, God only knows. For us it is a question of earning some money, that's all, there's nothing else for us.

Through the government of India's representation of the Sidis as 'African' dancers at arts and crafts festivals or before dignitaries like Nelson Mandela, Sidis are continually viewed as exotic tribals living marginalised lives in remote areas of the Gir forest, and within urban areas, living isolated and invisible lives for the mainstream Indian society. Mohammed's comments indicate that the Sidis themselves feel the urgency to move beyond thinking of themselves only as Africans, with strange, exotic pasts, especially since Bollywood drawing inspiration from its distant cousin Hollywood has also exploited these elements of African identity with feathers, skirts and the whole makeup thrown in as seen, for example, in the dances of blockbuster movies such as *Mr. India* (1985).

The dilemmas and the contradictions facing the Sidis can perhaps also be illuminated by Edward Alpers' (2002) analysis of diaspora and diasporic identity:

If we survey the Indian Ocean world we find that Africans generally do not identify themselves as African in any diasporic sense or do not feel that the social space exists for them to do so comfortably in their societies... African identity seems to lose much of its salience as people seek to integrate themselves into their host society. The absence of an intellectual elite to articulate irredentist sentiments and to place them in

public discourse is a major factor in silencing the kind of African identity, whether it be defined culturally or racially, with which we are familiar in the western hemisphere.

Intertwined with the question of culture and identity is the question of economics. Among the many urgent questions raised by Mohammed, the questions of livelihood are to be discussed at some length in my film. For most Sidis in Gori Pir village their means of livelihood is mostly their work at the *dargah* of Gori Pir. Most Sidis set up stalls where they sell flowers, coconuts, incense and other accessories for pilgrims and devotees. That this small scale vending enterprise and the *goma* dance are no longer a viable source of income for Sidis is explained by Mohammed (March 2000):

This place is emptying out. Many have left. What jobs are available here? At the most on Thursdays there are many people here and they buy all these items [flowers and coconuts, etc.]. Forest work is not suitable any more. In the past, when we didn't know better, we used to sell wood and make a living. Even selling stones, we could make a living. But now, none of these things benefit us.

Ismail, Badshah's son (March 2000), comments on the difficulties facing a Sidi today:

We work hard and get an education. Then we go for an interview... I went for an interview three times in the Police Force. I was asked for ten thousand rupees [about \$250]. They asked ten thousand rupees from me. But where am I to get it? These are some of the difficulties. We study to get ahead, but money is required for everything. So if the father's financial situation is good, then the children can study.

At the Sidi/Goma conference held in Rajpipla in February 2000 many Sidis used the forum to declare the urgent need to educate their children and find jobs, and particularly through the channels of job reservations that the government of India has instituted through quotas for the scheduled castes and tribes. At the conference, many Sidis expressed the view that they can no longer afford to be isolated and marginalised in the modern Indian nation-state. F.M., a Sidi delegate to the conference, discussed several issues with me (March 2000). F.M. is a middle class, educated Sidi woman from Gujarat who works in a bank. I quote her thoughts on the urgency of education for the Sidis:

...a lot of study on Sidis is on agate beads, but at the moment, education [of Sidis] is a priority. Then they can avail of the opportunities given to

them. Without an education, if they have to, say, fill forms [make an application], they don't know how to do these things. Grants from the government go back... because they [Sidis], don't know how to fill these forms; there's no one to guide them...it's not easy... if they had had a straightforward education, they would be able to take advantage of all such opportunities...

These interviews clearly indicate that the Sidis of Gori Pir village are at a crossroads. Although they are an important cultural and spiritual resource for thousands of devotees who come to the tomb of their ancestral saint, they themselves are looking for a way to express an identity as citizens of the modern Indian nation-state. Their African identity constructed through dance and music is important for the enactment of their rituals and ceremonies and for 'cultural officers' in the Indian government, but now the Sidis are looking for a way to express their identity as Indians of African descent, seeking a future, a place within Indian society. Their primary concern is about jobs and money.

Many questions remain before the Sidis: they are fighting to retain control over the tomb of their ancestral saint Gori Pir (Basu in this volume), they have fewer spirit mediums among their communities, and they are facing serious economic hardships. Will the younger generation of Sidis continue the *goma/dammal* dance? In my interviews with them, Badshah's sons (March 2000) told me that they are finding it difficult to maintain the vast repertoire and fund of energy of their father as *qawwal* and *dammal* dancer.

Pre-dawn in Gori Pir village, heralded by the playing of the drum at the *dargah*, resonates across the open land around the *dargah* of Gori Pir, all around the surrounding hills. This is the Sidi call to prayer before the traditional Islamic *azzan*, call to prayer. Ready with the camera, we capture the ambience of the *dargah*. It is customary for worshippers to walk around the *dargah* as the drums play. Several devotees get possessed, there is a vibrating electricity surrounding the *dargah* as the drums reverberate. How long will these rituals survive? How many Sidis will continue to work for their livelihood around the tomb of their saint? Many challenges lie ahead for the Sidis. Can the camera capture it all?

Notes

1. There is some controversy around exact dates. Nanavutty states that the Parsis first landed at Diu, an island off the southern extremity of Saurashtra. They then moved on to Sanjan in Gujarat around 785 AD; this is when most Parsis trace their settlement in India. For more on dates see Luhrmann 1996: 78.
2. Kulke (1974: 37) also points out Parsi last names connected to places in Gujarat where Parsis later settled, i.e. Bharucha (Broach), Anklesaria (Ankleshwar), Khambatta (Khambat/Cambay).
3. Also see Nanavutty p. 39.

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A Sidi CD?

Globalising African Indian Music and the Sacred

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy

Having been actors on the transoceanic stage for many centuries as sailors, merchants, slaves and soldiers plying goods and services over the Indian Ocean, Sidis are now re-entering the global, transnational cultural economy through the pathway of music and the sacred. This new avenue of commercial and intellectual interchange is challenging the foundations of Sidi ethnic identity, and may eventually weaken or strengthen their cultural moorings. My purpose in engaging in this process is to provide access to the tools of academia for Sidis to use in their inevitable encounter with modernity, so as to sustain continuity with their unique and valuable spiritual and performative heritage.

Both the musics of India and Africa have had immense influence on the musics of the world, but there are many differences in the ways the two have been carried beyond their native shores. Only in the past fifty years has Indian music become widely appreciated outside South Asia, through the musical missionising of such professional instrumentalists as Ravi Shankar, as well as the sacred Sufi vocalism of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan of Pakistan, and other great South Asian *qawwals*.

But for centuries, from the earliest days of contact with outsiders, African music has made a great impression on the world it has touched. During the colonial period, that contact was mainly with the victims of the slave trade, who carried their musical traditions to the New World, retaining elements of the great expressive heritage from which they had been wrenched so violently. African American musical expression functioned as a primary mechanism for coping with

the painful elements in the lives of exiled Africans and their descendants. Because it entered at the early stages of colonisation, African-American music had a major impact on the creation of vernacular musics throughout the Americas from their very inception. Today, the African American musical voice, with its unique rhythms, melodies, and kinaesthetic energy, has become globalised throughout the world's commercial popular music, in forms as diverse as jazz and rock, bebop and hip hop, gospel, rap, and funk, reggae, salsa, and samba.

The musical influence of Africans in India, however, has been quite different, due perhaps to their relatively smaller numbers, the long-established traditions of the Indian civilisation that received them, and their social isolation from the major pathways of Indian culture. But like diasporised Africans everywhere, African Indians brought with them, and in many cases continue to maintain, musical elements that are uniquely African in origin and structure, elements of a valuable artistic heritage that deserve to be explored and developed. It is this belief which guided us to create the conference on—and with—Sidis, to think of how best to develop Sidi participation in the global economy of intellectual property through nuanced presentation of their sacred dance and music.

I am approaching this topic from the perspective of applied anthropology/ethnomusicology, which seeks ways to design research that uses scholarly tools to address human problems.¹ My own work in this area has been among refugee communities from Cambodia and Laos who have been resettled in America, as well as among diverse communities in India. The Cambodian and Lao parallels to the Sidi situation are notable: both were forced migrations across vast distances to highly complex societies, and for both, music and dance have played a major role in conveying cultural memory and group identity (see Catlin 1991, 1997).

Origins of the Project

I first became involved in the Sidi musical world in 1998 while working with my husband and collaborator, Nazir Jairazbhoy, on the video *Musical Instruments of Kacch and its Neighbors* (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 1999). In partnership with the Research Unit of Indian National Theatre (INT), we conducted field research with the late Sri Mansukhbhai Joshi of INT Rajkot, a recent recipient of the Sangeet

Natak Akademi award in recognition of his support of Gujarati folk theatre and dance, including that of the Sidis. Mansukhbhai produced many events involving Sidi musicians and dancers of Gujarat, and described for us the fabulous excitement created by Sidi performers. Under his guidance, INT documented many of these performances for their archives, as has the national Sangit Natak Akademi. Umesh Jadia of the Kacch Museum, Bhuj, also collaborated in our field research. Almost fifteen years earlier, in 1975, Nazir recorded Shidi musicians in Lyari, Pakistan, a suburb of Karachi, while preparing a troupe to come to Washington, D.C. for the Smithsonian Institution's Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife held in 1976. They performed to great acclaim and made a deep impression upon American audiences, especially upon African Americans, who were interested to learn more of the African diaspora to the East. In our video, we included a three-minute excerpt of his Pakistani Shidi recordings and photographs of a danced item they called 'Shidi Leva,' along with a short scene on Sidi musical instruments at the Gori Pir Shrine in Bhuj, Kacch.

Soon after it was published we realised that this small Sidi segment of the hour-long video was for many viewers its most provocative element, a 'hook' to Americans and Indians alike who had never imagined an African presence on Indian soil. We found that Americans, because of their own daily experience of the African diaspora and their familiarity with its history, could relate much more easily to the Sidi footage than to that of Kacchi villagers, with whom they had no prior connection. After our first screening at UCLA, scholars of East Africa and the Indian Ocean urged us to investigate the Sidi materials further, especially Ned Alpers. I began to think of this subject as a useful tool for diversifying American thinking about India, a place normally considered as exotically and perhaps irrelevantly 'Other,' especially by African Americans. Similarly, I saw the subject as a tool for developing India's own awareness of Sidis, of whom most Indians are barely cognisant, if at all.² And last but not least, I saw the topic as a potential tool for the development of Sidi awareness of their own largely unacknowledged role in India's history, and to consider some of the special contributions they could make to India's present and future cultural, intellectual, and economic life. And so, after reading about Sidis in the Ethnographic Series of the Gujarat Census of 1961 (Trivedi 1961a & 1961b), we travelled to Rajpipla in

1999, and then to Uttara Kanara, to document some of the forms of Sidi music and dance. We gave copies of the video documentation to the two communities as a way of introducing them to each other. We suggested to the ex-royal family of Rajpipla that they host a small conference to bring these Sidi groups together with scholars from India and abroad, to discuss the role that their unique musical heritage could play in Sidi development, in ways that the Sidis themselves consider to be desirable.

The Sidis we met near Rajpipla welcomed the opportunity to consider new ways to improve their educational and economic level, and to develop certain elements of their performances for outsiders. They agreed that a project for producing a CD and cassettes of Sidi music might be an appropriate by-product of these discussions. And thus the Sidi CD Project was launched.

In Gujarat, the Sidis' main alliances are through kinship and the Sufi networks, within which they foster the gifts attributed to their Sufi saint and avowed ancestor, the black African mystic Gori Pir: these include their curly hair, their joyful spirit, their leonine associations, and their music and dance, as proclaimed in their song texts.

On the Mother's mountain we have lots of fun

Curly, curly hair

When we are all at Blessed Mother's

We have lots of fun after eating dal-and-rice

Curly, curly hair

We dance the dammal and have fun

Curly, curly hair (Basu 1994: 146, tr. from German by Catlin)

*'Son of a Sidi, just like a lion'*³ is a common refrain shouted during *dammals* (sacred dances), suggesting an identification with the lions of Gir Forest, Saurashtra, the last habitat of the Asian lion in India, where Sidis and lions both live. It may also signify a memory of African lions, for the lion motif was also an important insignia of the Sidis of Janjira Fort,⁴ where images still remain carved in the stone entrances. One at the main entrance shows a lion conquering an elephant, presumably symbolising Sidi domination of military forces in India.

Sidis also trace their heritage to Hazrat Bilal, whom some Sidis believe to have been Gori Pir's brother.⁵ Hazrat Bilal was a slave, the first black African follower of the Prophet Mohammad, and the first to be requested to recite the call to prayer by the Prophet, who favoured

him for his religious devotion. Because of this believed kinship to Hazrat Bilal, some Sidis say they are exceptionally gifted at reciting the *azan*, or call to prayer.⁶ They have special *jikrs* (danced devotional songs)⁷ dedicated to Bilal, and some even say that Bilal was a musician who played the lyre, *nangas*. Thus, their music and dance, tied to the foundations of their Islamic roots, serve as a major conveyor of ethnic identity for the Sidis.

As in other African diasporas, African Indians have long been observed by outsiders to be highly talented dancers, musicians, and comics. Until the previous generation this constituted a major means of livelihood in India within traditional networks. Before Independence, Sidi *fakirs* travelled from village to village as religious mendicants, dancing, drumming, and singing for alms, according to Basu's interviews in South Gujarat, especially during the month of Muharram⁸ as recipients of the obligatory Muslim titheing for the poor known as *zakat*.⁹ They also regularly received major donations brought to them by Bhils of food, grains and oil from the Maharaja of Rajpipla in a vested rite known as *copadio* (Basu 1994: 50). In Ahmedabad, Sidi women evidently still perform *basti*¹⁰ on Thursdays, singing *jikrs* and playing *Mai Mishra* rattles and *dammam* drums as blessings given to Muslim homes, and receiving alms, especially during the month of *Ramzan*¹¹ (Micklem 2001: 41, citing David 1997: 43).

In an account of Muslims in the Deccan in the 18th century, Sidis are described apparently parodying themselves in the annual religious festival of Muharram:

The Sidi or Sayyidi, 'Master', is an African negro, ten or twelve of whom blacken their bodies with lampblack and oil. ... In the left hand they carry a bamboo bow and in the right a coconut fastened to a short stick, the former containing some gravel which rattles, or sometimes it is covered with a cloth to which bells are attached. They dance to the rattling of the coconut, which they strike with the stick...

They twist their limbs about and mimic the jargon of negroes... (Sharif 1921[1832]/1975: 173)

This may be the earliest reference to the African-derived musical bow and coconut rattle of the Sidis in India, and to their dance.

A remarkable visual reference from the 19th century is a painting of the Sidi *dammal* in Kacch by an Indian Muslim artist, Lal Mohammad Juma. It shows the Sidis of Bhuj, the capital town, play-

ing their African-derived drums, the large footed *mugarman* and many small *dammal* drums, some with shoulder straps, the *malunga* braced musical bow played with *Mai Mishra* rattle in hand and topped by insignia flags, and an unidentified rectangular instrument, perhaps a rattle packet,¹² while a few townspeople dispassionately observe the open-air performance.

There is as yet little known in the historical record of Sidi *dammal* until after Independence, when the Government of India in its nationalistic demonstrations of ethnic diversity began to include Sidi cultural performance in the annual Republic Day Festivals in New Delhi.¹³ Dressed in costumes of recent African inspiration, such as those designed for them when they participated in a theatre production in New Delhi in 1988,¹⁴ Sidi dancers, singers, and instrumentalists provide an exotic ingredient in the national celebrations, as well as comparable regional and local ones. In New Delhi, they have danced for India's Prime Ministers and for Nelson Mandela and other visit-

Figure 14



Sidi *dammal*, Bhuj. Painting by Lal Mohamad Juma, 1887.
(Photographed by A. Catlin-Jairazbhoy with permission from Bharatiya Sanskriti Darshan Museum, Bhuj, Kacch)

ing African dignitaries. Yet despite this public exposure, no scholar has yet investigated the elements that constitute Sidi performance in order to determine how African musical styles, melodic and rhythmic structures, song texts, and musical instruments have informed these symbolic representations of African Indianness.¹⁵ Nor has there been any assessment of the possible influence of Sidi African musical traits on the surrounding musical culture of India.

This paper will attempt to address some of these gaps, to enable comparisons with musical practices and instruments of Africa and communities descended from African diasporas in South and Central America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean.

Ecstatic Dance: *Dammal*

The *dammal* dance is an essential element of the Sufi cult to Gori Pir that prevails among Sidis in Western India and Pakistan, with shrines in Sindh, Kacch, Saurashtra, north and south Gujarat, Bombay, and Uttara Kannada District of Karnataka.¹⁶ Sufism has for over eight centuries pervaded Western India and Pakistan, where numerous recognised forms are well-established, such as the Chistiya order with its emphasis on music. The cult to Gori Pir, however, seems to be distinct, without formal affiliation to the four major Sufi orders,¹⁷ although there is a traditional relationship to the Malang, Chistiya, and Rifa'i Sufis. The Gori Pir Sufi cult is dominated primarily by descendants of Africans, although worshipers from other Islamic communities as well as Bhil tribals, Hindus, Christians, and Parsis patronise the cult. Its legendary founder and saint, Gori Pir, is said by the Sidis to have come from Africa some seven centuries ago. According to various Sidi oral histories, Gori Pir's original name was Shidi Mubarak Nobi, suggesting Nubian origins. He encountered his Sufi master in Iraq, Ahmad Kabir Rifa'i (Basu 1999: 9), presumed to be of the lineage of Ahmad ibn ar-Rifa'i (1106–82), founder of the Rifa'i movement. The Rifa'i were renowned for their retreat in the swamps of Southern Iraq where they meditated and engaged in ecstatic dancing, firewalking, and riding lions (Trimingham 1971: 37–38). His Rifa'i master renamed him either Baba Ghaur (Saint of Deep Meditation) or Baba Ghur (Saint of the Deep Pit, Valley)¹⁸ and sent him on his missionising journey to India. He eventually arrived in south Gujarat, kept the tigers at bay through his miracles, and be-

came centrally involved in the agate industry, which continued to be a major source of economic support for his Sidi followers who dominated the agate business in their region until after Independence (Trivedi 1961b). During that time, Sidis participated in the agate trade with the Gulf and East Africa, where agates, as in India, are believed to have supernatural properties. Agate prayer beads and talismans were carried by Muslims departing from Cambay for protection on the Haj pilgrimage and for trade throughout the Indian Ocean world.

As time passed, Baba Ghur's name was Indianised to Bava Gor (Saint of the Grave, Urdu *gor*, losing the Perso-Arabic *gh*), reflecting his state as an entombed saint. Nobody knows when it began, but his followers today maintain a form of ecstatic worship involving group trance dancing, called in Gujarati Sidi *dammal*, from the Urdu *dhammal*, *dhamal* (Prakrit *dhamm*, a loud sound, + *alo*). The Urdu *dhammal* is defined by Platts (1911: 546) as

Jumping into, or running through fire (a practice of *faqirs* or *qalandars*)¹⁹; skipping and capering; a musical measure; a piece composed in that measure; a kind of song (sung during the Holi festival); wild and tumultuous merriment, noise, tumult, uproar.

Platts also gives an alternate Sanskrit derivation from *dharm*, 'virtue', and Monier-Williams offers yet another Sanskrit derivation from *dham*, 'to blow a conch shell or other wind instrument' (Monier-Williams 1899: 509). These possible roots suggest etymologising, and perhaps a longstanding tradition of associating virtue and sacred breath with *dammal* in typically syncretic Hindu-Muslim Sufi fashion. This same derivation appears in a description of firewalking by 18th century Madari *faqirs* in the Deccan (probably in the region of Madras) observed by Sharif, most likely expanded with Hindu parallels during Herklots' translating and Crooke's editing and linguistic interpretations.

Some perform the rite of fire-walking in the name of the Saint. This is known as *Dhammal kudna*, *dhammal* meaning 'the place of virtuous conduct' (*dharma*) and *kudna*, 'to leap.' They kindle a large fire, send for the *Tabaqati*?, or *Faqirs* of this Order, and give them a present. The *Faqirs* recite the *Fatiha*, sprinkle sandalwood in the fire, and then the chief of the band leads the way by jumping into it, calling out, '*Dam Madar! Dam Madar!*' 'the breath of Madar', this, as among the Persians, being supposed to be a protective against the flames, the bite of a snake, or the sting of a scorpion. Then the rest follow him also shouting '*Dam Madar!*' and tread out the fire (Sharif 1921[1832]/1975: 195–96).

Firewalking, similarly called *dammal kudna* by Sidis, is one of their sacred observances during the *urs* celebration of the death anniversary of their founding saint, Gori Pir, held in the month of Rajjab (Basu 1994: 155). The Sidi *dammal* ecstatic dance is also traditionally presented during the annual *urs* as well as for outsiders who wish to enjoy their music and dance, whether by invitation to their homes for celebrations, to public spaces for festivities, or within the precincts of a Sidi or other shrine. There are instances of danced worship among other Sufi *faqirs* and followers, such as the daily group trance-dancing at the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sindh in Sehwan, Pakistan (Abbas in press, 33–35; Sakata 2000: 754, 760). The entire Sidi community participates in the *dammal*, regardless of age or gender, very unusual in India except in tribal communities. This ecstatic dance is done in a highly structured fashion for major religious observances, with frequent episodes of individual trance possession. It is also performed for visitors to the shrine who request it, and outside the shrine context when invited by organisers of special events such as public folkloric festivals and private celebrations.

Sidis also use the term Sidi *goma* (*goma/ngoma*, Bantu/Swahili, ‘drum/drum dance’) for the *dammal* dance.²⁰ Many Sidi dance troupes call themselves ‘Sidi Goma Group’,²¹ they named their dance competitions in the 1980s ‘Sidi Goma Competition’ and they referred to the Rajpipla conference as ‘Sidi Goma Conference’. It is possible that the term came into use among the Sidis fairly recently, perhaps through East African contacts, as earlier written accounts usually used *dammal*. The same term is often found in 19th century accounts of social dancing in slave centres.²² *Ngoma* is the Swahili name of an important drum-dance healing ritual in South and Central Africa, including the coastal areas (see Janzen 1992). Like the *mugarman* and *Selani Mama*, the African *ngoma* is a long wooden drum, open at one end, often with cutaway legs, whose single head is attached by pegs (Janzen 1992: 70). As in the widespread African institution of *ngoma*, the Sidi *goma* is sung in responsorial style, but not between healer and sufferer(s) as in Africa, but between leader and chorus. Other similarities in the use of the drum as a sacred instrument for rituals as well as a secular instrument for danced entertainment abound, but the Sidis never refer to the drum as *goma*, only the dance.

Musical Bow: *Malunga*

In the Indian context, one of the most unusual instruments played by the Sidis is the *malunga* braced musical bow, otherwise unknown in India.²³ *Malunga*, according to one Bantu linguist, is 'a wonderfully Eastern African Bantu word in structure. It may derive from the verb *lung*, meaning "to join by tying"' (Ehret 1999). It is played to awaken Sidis during Ramzan,²⁴ and also to accompany *qawwali* (Muslim devotional songs), as well as in the *dammal*. Some players still recalled wandering as *faqirs* to sing and play the *malunga* at the Ajmer shrine to the Sufi saint, Moinuddin Chhisti (Interview, Murjan Ismail Sidi, 26 December 2001). We were told of a Sidi *malunga* player in permanent residence at the Kalyar Sharif shrine near Agra (Interview, Sikander Badshah Sidi, Mumbai 3 February 2001). The *malunga's* name, structure, playing technique, and musical patterns closely resemble many African forms.²⁵ The structure of the Sidi musical bow, with fixed gourd resonator and tuning noose, is most similar to '...a large number of African instruments, covering a very wide area, chiefly south of the Equator and principally associated with peoples within the limit of range of the great Bantu stock' (Balfour 1976 [1899]: 19–20).

When I showed them a two-minute video of Afro-Brazilians performing *capoeira*, a form of martial arts training first practised secretly by African slaves in Brazil (Fuji 1990),²⁶ many Sidis noted similarities in movement style between the *capoeira* martial arts dance and their *dammal*. But unlike *capoeira*, the Sidi form has not been published or globalised via cassette, CD or film,²⁷ although they do circulate private recordings among themselves, as do foreign scholars with their research recordings.

The Sidis of Gujarat were fascinated by the musical bow of *capoeira*, which they said was constructed and played exactly like their own musical bow.²⁸ The *berimbau* has become standardised today as a braced musical bow with gourd resonator virtually identical in structure and playing technique to the *malunga*. Initially used in Brazil by slaves primarily for begging or attracting customers to their masters' wares, its various names and forms prior to the 19th century can be traced to origins in various parts of Central and West Africa, especially Angola and the Kongo (Graham 1991: 5–6). Like the *berimbau*, the string of the *malunga* is separated into two parts of differing pitches

Figure 15



Sidi *malunga* braced musical bow played by Sidi Salam Jaffar during performance at the *urs* of Hazrat Banda Parvar Pir Bhikan Shah Wali, hosted by the Sidi Nawab of Sachin, December 2001 (Photo: A. Catlin-Jairazbhoy)

by a tuning noose, or brace, tied around both bow and string at a point where octaves result. A resonating half-gourd is moved nearer and farther from the body to create timbre modulations, similar to vocal modulations produced by the mouth when altering the lips from 'ooo' to 'aaa' ('wa-wa'). The string is struck with a stick held in the right hand which also holds a rattle—a coconut rattle is used by the Sidis, but a basket rattle in Brazil. Elements of *capoeira*, including the musical bow, have recently become integrated into globalised forms of Afro-Brazilian commercial popular music, widely available on cassettes and CDs. The Sidis found this fact most inspiring, as well as seeing their 'diaspora brothers' in Brazil, whom they referred to as Sidis, playing their musical bow and dancing in their martial-arts style on the Brazilian seashore. The Sidis said their playing styles and dance were 'the same', but one wonders whether changes will be necessary in their tradition in order to arrive at the point of globalisation. For in Brazil, numerous African musical bow forms were hybridised into one, along with further technological developments, pan-ethnic adoption of the instrument and nationalisation in folk and popular forms (Graham 1991: 17). In contrast, the Sidi *malunga* has never been adopted by other groups, and is evidently disappearing.²⁹ It is rarely seen in *dammal* performances today, while drums, rattles and conches prevail. This was a surprising discovery given that the *malunga* is called *Gori Sultan ka nishan*, 'the symbol of Gori Pir,' and is carried in processions by the *nishandar*, 'bearer of the insignia,' one of the five elders in the Sidi council. The 1887 painting from Kacch includes a *malunga* musical bow with the two flags, or insignia, displayed from the top.

Footed Drums: *Mugarman* and *Selani Mama*

As we have seen with the *malunga*, one of the identifying features of Sidi culture is the use of musical instruments of evident African origin that are unique in India. These are often named for legendary ancestors. Their central drums, vertical and cylindrical in shape, are constructed in the same way as the *ngoma* drum of Zimbabwe today: a hollowed log into which three arches are cut into the base to form three 'feet'.³⁰ These are the only footed drums known to exist in South Asia. One form is called the *mugarman* (also pronounced *mugharman*, *mogarman*, *mokaramba*).³¹ Its skin is attached by wooden pegs, another technique

rare in South Asia but common in Africa.³² The *mugarman* is played with the hands, and only by men, one or two standing at the drum at a time. Women are sometimes forbidden to touch it, and in some cases, even to see it, and it may never be removed from its shrine. At the opening of a *dammal*, the *mujawar* (priest) may make an offering by placing a raw egg on the *mugarman* drum head, then brushing it off to spill its contents onto the centre of the ground that the dancers will circle.³³ This practice is unusual in India.

A smaller version of the *mugarman* is the *Selani Mama* (Maternal Uncle Selani—presumably another legendary ancestor, whose identity is unclear). In Gogha, Saurashtra, the word ‘*Selani*’ is also used for Sidis who have left the village (of which the residents told us there are a great number), just as throughout Gujarat for the footed drum, if it is allowed out of a shrine to tour with performers. The feet of both *mugarman* and *Selani Mama* may also be made differently, either by attaching legs or even by mounting a metal oil barrel to a stand having four metal legs, the latter especially for touring groups.

Figure 16

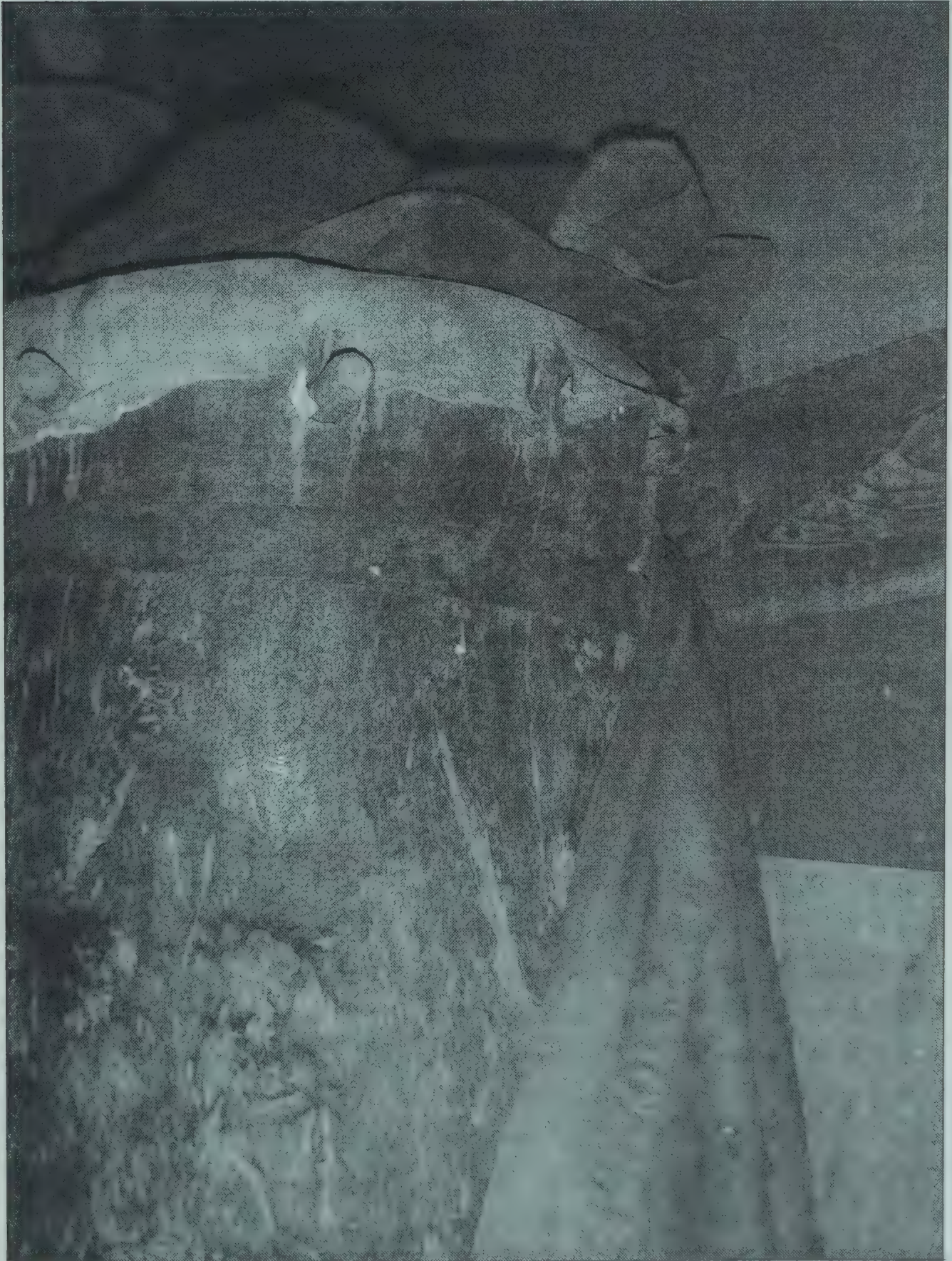


Feet of *Mugarman* in the Jamnagar *chilla* to Gori Pir, with Islamic arch.
Photo A. Catlin-Jairazbhoy, January 2002.

Carried Drums: *Musindo* and *Dammal/Damama*

The Sidi *musindo* is very similar to the ubiquitous Indian *dhol*, a large laced barrel-shaped drum slung around the player's neck. But unlike the *dhol*, which is played with one or two sticks, the *musindo* is played

Figure 17



Pegged drumhead of *mugarman*, Bhuj, Kacch.
Photo: A. Catlin-Jairazbhoy, January 2002.

only with the hands, like all Sidi drums, and by men, but occasionally also by women. It still retains an evidently African-derived name: *msondo* is the name of various cylindrical drums found widely in coastal Tanzania (Martin 1998: 637). Ethiopian precedents may have also provided a preference leading to the merging of the *dhol* with African ideas to create the Sidi *musindo*. Anthropology student Eskender Mekonnen made the connection to Ethiopian forms when he saw a photo of a Sidi ensemble with *musindo* on a BBC website (Whitehead 2000). Mekonnen wrote,

The drum in the old man's hand resembles the instrument used by most Ethiopians ever since hundred years ago and still currently is being used, especially in the Orthodox Christians and their descendants. Some of the tribes in Ethiopia who are using and have been using this kind of instrument are the Amhara, Tigere (sic), etc. These tribes are mostly found in the northern provinces of Ethiopia such as Gondar, Gojjam [Gojjam], Wolo, Tigray, Bahir Dar, and also around the source of Blue Nile-Lake Tana. Also the way the man had the drum around the neck, exactly the way my people use that instrument. In Amharic we call it *kebero* (Mekonnen 2000).

He refers to the barrel-shaped, laced drum of the Tigray (Marcuse 1964: 119).³⁴ This would support the theory that familiar cultural traits are more likely to be adopted (i.e., the *dhol* and its playing position) than unfamiliar ones (Merriam 1955: 28, quoted in Merriam 1964: 314). Kubik calls this tendency 'reinforcement' in Brazil.³⁵

The distinctive *dammal* drum is a small armpit-held laced cylindrical drum played by *dammal* dancers that is quite unusual in India.³⁶ It is especially effective in spinning and rapid small steps forward or backward, both movement styles unusual in India. Sometimes it is called *damama*, the name of the large kettledrum in India originating in Persia often called *nagara* (Marcuse 1964: 141).

Other Indian drums may also participate in the *dammal*, such as the smaller *nagara* kettledrum pair, the single shallow kettledrum *tasa*, and the frame drum *daf*. Some of these instruments have been refurbished with modern plastic drumheads. An extremely large single *nagara* is also played at the shrine to Nagarci Pir during rituals and *namaz* (prayers).³⁷ Considered to be the brother of Gori Pir, Nagarci Pir is believed by some to have been an African *nagara* player in the invading army of Mahmud of Ghazni (Patel 1991: 18),³⁸ by others to have arrived by sea on the Saurashtra coast, only a few miles from

his shrine in Jambur. Some Sidis in Jambur say he never played the *nagara*, but his name does mean 'nagara player'. His is perhaps the finest looking shrine of the Sidis, having a large dome and colorful tiles both outside and inside.

Coconut Rattles: *Mai Mishra*

Another African-derived instrument named for a legendary ancestor is the coconut rattle played by women, men and children. It is called *Mai Mishra* meaning 'Mother Egypt' in Urdu (after the Misr region of Egypt). Mai Mishra, the legendary sister of Gori Pir, led a group of their female kin to India in order to help him in his struggles with a local demoness. Coconut rattles are widespread in Africa and in the diaspora westward, but are very uncommon in India.³⁹ A coconut rattle is also used by Karnatak Sidis in their harvest circle dances. Its name, *mucako*, is likely to be African in origin as it contains the syllable 'ca' found in many African rattle names (DeVale e-mail communication 1999), and appears to be Bantu in structure.

Conches: *Nafir*

Marine-shell trumpets are used throughout the Indian Ocean world, especially in ceremonial contexts. The Sidis use mostly conches, and some shrines such as Diu have large collections, where they are kept with all the other *dammal* musical instruments and ritual items, as in all the shrines. The Sidis of Jambur use animal-horn trumpets, but still call them by the Arabo-Persian word *nafir* (which they often pronounce as *nafil*), which refers to a straight metal trumpet used by the Arabs since the 11th century in military and royal processions, and adopted into Indian usage soon after that time.

Thought: *Jikrs*

All these instruments accompany the *dammal*, interlocking their parts in rhythmic counterpoint that strongly resembles the patterning of East and South African percussion ensembles,⁴⁰ unusual in India except among tribal ensembles. The underlying structure of most of the patterns is the rhythm of the unspoken *jikr Allah hu, Nabi ji* (He is Allah, respected Prophet) in a four-beat repeating pattern, usually of short-short long, short-short long, but sometimes with dotted values in the short notes. This repetition is the essence of *jikr*, but it also

could be likened to the time-line in African music.⁴¹ This recalls the use of drums or melody instruments as a speech surrogate system to communicate linguistic material, as in the 'talking drums' of Africa (Stern 1976), Tepehua 'thought-songs' (Boiles 1967) and Hmong 'talking reeds' (Catlin 1997). Another rhythm occasionally played is called *tambol*,⁴² a six-beat (or twelve-beat) meter that alternates between 2+2+2 and 3+3, similar to the *sesquialtera* ('altered sixes') of Spanish flamenco. Similar patterns are often associated with ecstatic and trance dancing, prevalent in Gujarat as well as Africa; it is a prevailing pattern among Tumbuka drummers for trance healing in Malawi (Friedson 1996: 128–62). But the Sidi form is distinctively enriched by three-part interlocking patterns.

Vocal Music: *Jikr*, *Qawwali*

Jikr, meaning remembrance, mentioning, or telling (Platts 1911: 577) is normally used in Sufi circles to refer to 'the rhythmic repetition of God's name or a short phrase in his praise' (Qureshi 1986: 246). This may include the incantation of the names and attributes of the Prophet Mohammad and the Sufi mystics. But for the Sidis, it also refers to a body of songs retelling the praises and attributes of their special saints. Pronounced in Gujarati as *jikr*, there are said to be 125 of these songs that are known to each *nangasi*, or leader of musicians (also known as *nagarci*, meaning 'nagara player'). But since the death of the late Kamar Badshah, said to have known all 125, there is no one individual who knows the entire corpus. Kamar Badshah was the grandson of the beloved *nangasi* Murjan Miyan, who composed many *jikrs* and whose hereditary title of *nangasi* Kamar Badshah inherited. These longer *jikr* are sung during seated sessions called *baithi dammal* (seated *dammal*), with offerings of *loban* (from Arabic *luban*, frankincense [Platts 1911: 949]) at the beginning to sanctify the act. Some *jikrs* also require the sharing of sacred drinks, *kavo*, one of sweetened milk and one of peppery spices. Shorter, repetitive *jikrs* are sung and shouted by the dancers during the *dammal* dance, called *khari dammal* (standing *dammal*) in contrast to the seated *dammal* which often precedes the dancing. *Khari dammal* are more energetic and rhythmic musically, while *baiti dammal* are generally more meditative, but both lead to an ecstatic climax heightened by the accompanying drums, rattles, conches, and sometimes, *malunga*.

The following is the text of a *jikr* credited to Murjan Miyan that we have recorded as sung by different Sidi groups in Gujarat, in various versions. Notice the prominence accorded to Hazrat Bilal (line 14), who frequently appears in Sidi *jikr* texts.⁴³ This transcription is from a cassette recording of three *baithi dammal* led by the composer's grandson Kamar Badshah in his home during the Jangli Pir Urs in the late 1990s. He circulated the tape among the community, and we were loaned a copy by the *mujawar* of the Sidi shrine in Rander who allowed us to copy it. The transcription is by Kamar's son Shakil Kamar Sidi, translated into English by Catlin, with help from Sidi Salam Jaffar.

Avle bismillah barkate bismillah daruda payambar ka

In the name of Allah the highest, blessings in the name of Allah,
salutations to the Prophet

Bismillah johre bismillah daruda payambar, bismillah Nabi bismillah

In the name of Allah, repeat the blessings on the Prophet,
in the name of Allah and the Prophet

Bismillah karim ar rahmana rahima

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Forgiving,
the Compassionate,

Haqq la illaha illala

Truly, There is one God and only one God

Jikr illahi Nabi Mohammad rasulillah

Recall God and the Prophet Mohammad, the Prophet of God

O sadat labbaiq ko

Oh Masters, we stand to receive your bidding,

Mai Mishra labbaiq ko vo sada labbaiq Nabi

Mai Mishra, we await at your bidding, guilelessly we await the
Prophet's command

Vala he vala nangasi vo

He is the sublime, the eminent, the supreme *nangasi*

Amade hai nangasi o ya ho Allah

Nangasi has arrived, *o ya ho Allah*

Nangase nam saccha

All *nangasis* have the true name

Ao, sacche Nabe

Come, Thou true Prophets

(tempo speeds up, conch enters, excitement builds continually to the end)

Dom Bava pyara ham nangasiyon ya hoye nangasiyon

Hail, Bava has given the gift to each beloved *nangasi*

Nangasiyon maulana nangasiyon nangase savab miyan

Every *nangasi* is rewarded for his deeds by the Lord God
Allah hu Allah ha Bilal
 He is God, he is Bilal
Samandar o dariya e Bava jan khwaja dana auliya
 Bava took from the ocean, from the sea,
 and gave to the wise men and friends of Allah
Dariya se mauj hai, dane ki mauj hai
 It is joy/waves (*mauj*, wave/enjoyment) from the ocean,
 a gift of waves/ecstasy
Sai maula Gori Badshah ki mauj, saccha maula
 The true lord and sovereign, Gori Pir's joy. The true Lord.
B lo, khwaja ki lahar hai
 Say, the Saint's rapture/waves (*lahar*)
Bolo, samandron ka lehra hai
 Say, the ocean's waves/rapture (*lahar*)
Saccha maula hai, bolo Bava jan, (—) maula hai
 He is the true Lord, say Bava beloved, the jewel of lords
Bava khair Allah ya ho e. Allah khair, Bava ya ho e.
 Besides Bava, there is Allah. Besides Allah,
 there is Gori Badshah Bava
Sukar hamdul illah ya ho e Gori Badshah. Sukar hamdul illah.
Ae rahmana.
 Thanks be to Allah, praises to Gori Badshah, Thanks be to Allah,
 the merciful.

This *jikr* makes word-play on two synonyms, with identical double meanings, *mauj* and *lahar*, both meaning 'wave' as well as 'enjoyment, rapture, ecstasy or frenzy'. It pictures Gori Pir obtaining his spiritual gifts of joy and rapture from the waves of the sea during his lengthy journey to India, and then sharing the gift with the seekers who come into his presence. To listen to this *jikr* is to be reminded of a ship setting sail slowly, and then coursing through the waves. It also portrays in sound, and fosters, the spiritual journey to ecstasy.

Most of this *jikr* text is in Urdu and Gujarati, with a notable exception: *nangasi*, the title of the music leader, and one of the five *gaddivaris* ('throne + protector'), the hereditary committee of respected leaders. The *nangas* from which the *nangasi* title is derived is evidently their bowl lyre originating in East Africa that is no longer played by the Sidis, although it is venerated in some Sidi shrines. Some Sidis still remember seeing the instrument being played, however, and say that formerly the *nangasi* played it to lead the group. The lyre is

not known in India, beyond one questionable sculpture from an Indus Valley inscription (Deva 1978: 141), although it was found throughout ancient western Asian civilisations (Poche 2001: 358). The evident East African progenitor of the *nangas* is the bowl lyre used from antiquity to the present day, and its name may derive from the Ganda word for lyre, *ennanga* (Andrew Tracey, e-mail communication 7/7/2000). This is a floating term used widely in the region for harps, harp-lyres, musical bows, zithers, and even the European organ (Marcuse 1964: 170). Nuban African Arab descendants of African slaves living in the Gulf still play a similar lyre during their exorcistic healing rituals, believed to have originated in Ethiopia (Racy 1988; 1992; Racy 2001: 546). The Sidis of Gujarat were deeply impressed when we showed them Jihad and Barbara Racy's videos of the Nuban of the Gulf and their lyre. Some vowed to revive the instrument in India when we assured them it has become extinct, along with the Sidi lute *jeje*⁴⁴ which we never found.

Other *jikrs* repeated during *dammal* have segments seemingly interjected at random that appear to be from folksongs, especially local references to nature: animals, birds, insects, and plants. One such example heard frequently in both *baithi* and *khari dammal* performances is the curious couplet

Makota cunke le jayega
Kabatar chinke le jayega

The large ant will select (the grain) and take it away
 The pigeon will snatch (the grain) and take it away.

This couplet and similar ones appear in *khari dammal* dances, along with the sacred *jikrs* of Islam and Sufism, such as the *qalma*, Muslim profession of faith (*La illaha illallah...*), praises of the Sufi saints (*damadam Mast Qalandar*) and of Gori Pir and his family (*Gor Gor Bava Gor*). Both genres are said to contain many Swahili words, but we found few examples in the handful of texts we have transcribed. The most frequently occurring were phrases such as *yaho*, *yale*, and *hoya* in various combinations—euphonious Swahili words that simply mean 'these' and 'those'.⁴⁵

There is also a women's repertoire of *jikrs* to Mai Mishra, sung during propitiatory rituals along with the making of Mai Mishra's *kichri*, a dish of rice and *dal*, which is then shared. These songs are not usually performed outside the actual ritual.⁴⁶

Qawwali

Another form of music which until recently appeared at the shrine is the singing of *qawwali* devotional songs to Gori Pir by Sidi musicians, with the typical *qawwali* accompaniments of harmonium, *dholak*, and *bulbultarang/taisho koto*, a keyed zither imported from Japan in the early 20th century. The singing of *qawwali* represents an alliance of ideology especially with the Chishti order of Sufism, the chief source of the *qawwali* genre, both as an aid to achieving spiritual enlightenment and as a missionising tool. Chishtiya Sufi *qawwali* is performed to poetic texts that convey the Sufi message of love and devotion for Allah, the Prophet Mohammad, Hazrat Ali and his sons Hassan and Hussein, as well as the Sufi saints. Similarly, Sidi Sufi *qawwali* texts praise their founder Gori Pir as a saint in the same lineage, and preach the messages of mysticism and monism which characterise all Sufism. *Qawwali* were performed by Sidi *qawwals* on the steps leading to the shrine and in a room adjacent to the shrine (Basu 1994: 129) until recent objections from Islamic reformers stopped the practice, principally the Sunni Bohra Ismailis who have become involved in the administration of the shrine (see chapter in this volume by Helene Basu). These reformers have also constructed a new mosque attached to the shrine for praying according to mainstream Islamic practices. But Sidi *qawwals* still perform for gatherings outside the shrine precincts, and until his death in May 2000, Kamar Badshah sang unaccompanied *qawwalis* at the very tomb itself while making offerings.

Other contestation occurs with fundamentalist Islamic groups who occasionally tour in processions through the area urging the abolition of so-called *beshar* ('illegal') forms of Islam including Sufism and to flock to the fold of hegemonic Islam. Such pressures of Islamisation will no doubt continue to be felt by the Sidis, being a tiny population of perhaps ten thousand in Gujarat (Micklem 2001: 25). But luckily, the Sidis have fostered qualities of independence, resistance, humour, and an ability to cope with outsiders' views which have so far helped preserve their unique way of life. And because Sidi culture is born of their long history of liminality and close association with other Sufi cults, *faqirs*, and wandering holy people, 'outsiders' who rejected or were denied mainstream social positions, their sacred dance and music reflect this.

The Survey of Sidi Music

After the Rajpipla meeting we agreed to collaborate with the Sidis on a musical survey of their various communities, and prepared documentation sheets with them in Gujarati. These were filled by Saiyyad Abdulrehman Sidi (1926–2001) during January–February 2001 for 29 Sidi settlements in Gujarat. In addition to surveying many other settlements, we returned to check most of Abdulrehman's villages with a young Sidi trainee in documentation fieldwork during a two-month tour of Gujarat from December 2001–February 2002.⁴⁷ We found that people's impressions about the presence of the *malunga* recorded by Abdulrehman were often out of date. The result was the surprising finding that only about five *malunga* were still in existence, and these were played mostly by elderly men without successors. One brother-sister pair were unique in involving a woman in the *malunga* tradition. When we informed the Sidis at the main shrine, they welcomed the invitation to Zainabad for a two-week *malunga* camp that was offered by Dhanraj Malik, son of the ex-Nawab of Zainabad, for the month of February 2003. We then commissioned the expert *malunga* artist and maker, the *nishandar* living in Rajpipla, Sidi Salam Jaffar, to make enough instruments for the two-week camp. He has already completed them (July 2002) with the help of a young Sidi man, Abdul Hamid Sidi, who has begun learning the instrument as a result of this interest.

At the outset of each encounter with a new Sidi community, and to introduce the project, I delivered a speech in Hindi/Urdu to be sure that misunderstandings were minimised. This is the English translation of the speech that appears at the beginning of this volume in Hindi, with modifications to introduce the publication.

My Sidi brothers and sisters, *as-salam aleikum!*

My name is Amine, and my husband's name is Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy. His grandfather first left Kacch (Gujarat) to live in Bombay one hundred and fifty years ago. We both teach in the University of California in Los Angeles. We live in America, but still our hearts are Hindusthani.⁴⁸

There are many 'Sidi' people in America. Nowadays they are called 'African American' or 'black people'. In former times their ancestors were slaves. Then our most beloved president, Ibrahim Lincoln, gave them freedom 150 years ago. He was known as 'Honest Abe' just like your 'Imandar Mubarak'.⁴⁹ But nowadays, in American society, many black people have difficulties. Therefore many people and organisa-

tions give them help. Forty years ago, during my childhood, our 'Civil Rights Movement' took place, a movement to give equality to African Americans. This movement had a profound effect on me. For this reason I wanted to get to know you Sidi people.

I have heard, and can also see, that you people also have difficulties in this country. Another matter is that you Sidis are Sufi Muslims. Nowadays throughout the world, Islam is very important, but people's understanding of Islam is sometimes mistaken. Also, in America and Europe many people are attracted to Sufi Islam, and want to know more about it. We both teach about the classical and folk music, history and religion of India. We want to teach and write about your history, and especially your *dammal* and *jikr*, because very few people in the world know anything about Sidis. Your *dammal* and *jikr* are very interesting and important traditions. In the whole world, they are unique and wonderful. As you know, Gori Pir was a very holy *faqir*, and his teachings should be made known throughout the world.

You also know that Mai Mishra, Bava Abbas, Sidi Mukta, Bava Hasan, and Nangasi Pir were all important *faqirs*. During our research we have talked with many Sidis in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. Two years ago, in 1999, we made arrangements for a Sidi conference in Rajpipla, and the Raja and Rani were the hosts. In this conference at least 300 Sidi men and women came from Kacch, Saurashtra, Gujarat, Mumbai, and Karnataka, along with ten or twelve local and foreign scholars. In this conference, many Sidi people said that education and jobs are very necessary.

But how to improve your lives, without spoiling your culture, without destroying your traditions and customs?

At the Rajpipla conference, we all thought that we should make one or two Sidi cassettes or CDs. In the conference many of your people gave support to this idea. We made plans to record your finest Sidi *dammal* and *jikr* singers and players, and give some money at that time. After that, we will present you with the finished cassette for you to sell throughout India, to get some work and earning. Aside from this benefit, people will increase their knowledge of your history and your lives. And we will also try to sell the CD outside India, to spread your name, and with whatever profits accrue, we will make a Sidi Trust Fund. God willing, one day many people, and also your children, and your children's children too, will hear today's Sidi songs and *jikrs* and *dammal*, and will learn Gori Pir's history.

The response we received to the speech ranged from positive to extremely enthusiastic, and we never encountered problems proceeding with the recordings. During the survey, we made digital recordings of about forty hours of Sidi music of many types, selected, edited, and mastered the items to be included in the Sidi CD and cas-

sette, to be sold in India by the Sidi musicians when they perform for outsiders.⁵⁰

Media, Tourism, Globalisation, Development: At What Price?

Media attention and invitations for Sidi performers to tour the entire length and breadth of India have expanded in recent years, invitations coming from five-star hotels and major festivals, even as far as the Andaman Islands. Religious pilgrimage to the central shrine is also increasing, and building projects have continued to modify and expand the shrine on a constant basis. New roads are being built regularly to improve access to pilgrims, and tourists will soon follow. Some Sidis are thinking of building guesthouses, and one cannot avoid wondering if another Khajuraho could be in the making.⁵¹ And what will be the impact upon the music and dance of the Sidis? Already there is controversy surrounding their performances, as some Sidis question whether they are secularising their sacred traditions, and changing them to suit secular audiences. The leader of the central group at the main shrine to Gori Pir maintains that their performances are a natural extension of their former touring practices as *faqirs*, and that their performances in secular environments are no less sacred than before (Interview, SKS, 2002). But some are not so convinced (see article by Shroff in this volume).

These and other questions will be put to a new test during the first Sidi tour outside India to England and Wales in September and October, 2002. A group of twelve musicians, singers and dancers will leave their shrine before the holy month Ramzan, immediately after the annual *urs* to Gori Pir in the month of Rajjab.⁵² In a series called *Music of the Mystics* that stresses spiritual aspects of music cross-culturally, they are billed as 'Sidi Goma: Black Sufis of Gujarat' to represent the mystic tradition of Gori Pir.⁵³ Each programme will begin with the Sidi *muezzin* chanting the evening call to prayer, *azan*, symbolic of their membership in the Muslim *umma*, followed by the *baithi dammal* 'Avle Bismillah' translated above with ritual burning of incense, seated singing of some *khari dammal*, and a *qawwali* to Gori Pir. After intermission, a *malunga* solo will quietly begin, followed by a climactic *dammal* in costumes, finally ending by inviting audience participation in the ecstatic dance, as occurs during *dammals* at

the shrines. Programme notes will give historical and cultural perspective on the performance, and workshops will provide more intimate settings for face-to-face interaction. The sacred element will be emphasised at every opportunity.

But what will become of their 'spiritual capital' when their music and dance are commodified into performances, recordings and videos? Will it be strengthened or corrupted by entering the global marketplace? Will money interfere with an already fragmented Sidi solidarity, or help to enhance it? Will cultural tourists begin to flock to the shrine to ask questions of the Sidis following our scholarly pilgrimages, and cause them to question themselves? Will recording companies, filmmakers and photographers take advantage of the Sidis without offering fair compensation, or will they provide them with opportunities for educational and economic development? Will officialdom in the recently communalised state of Gujarat and in the newly terrorised world seek to repress the first international Sidi tour with its celebration of Muslim diversity? Will there be approbations from orthodox Islamic circles? As applied scholars, we can participate actively in the discussions as they arise, offer our knowledge and connections, and apply ourselves as fully as we are able to the process of problem solving—in the Sidis' best interests and towards the better understanding of their newly globalised world. The recently completed Sidi CD, *Sidi Sufis: African Indian Mystics of Gujarat* will be given to them for publication and sale in India, while we continue to market it elsewhere to benefit Sidi educational projects.⁵⁴ We hope this collaborative endeavour will contribute to better appreciation and understanding of this marginalised community and its sacred traditions, and provide the Sidi with a credible, profitable, and educational commodity for their own development.⁵⁵

Notes

1. 'Applied anthropologists use the knowledge, skills, and perspective of their discipline to help solve human problems and facilitate change' (Chambers 1985: 8).
2. James Micklem states that the majority of Gujaratis are probably unaware of the Sidis in their state and calculates they total some 10,000 (Micklem 2001: 14, 25).
3. Field recordings, Bhavnagar 29 February 2000.

4. On India's west coast, south of Bombay.
5. Interview, Husseinbhai Mujawar, Rajkot 14 March 2002.
6. Interview, Murjan Ismail Sidi, Rajpipla 28 December 2001.
7. See recordings on Catlin 2002 of the *jikr* 'Sobilale', as well as the text given later in this paper.
8. First month of the Muslim year, a time of mourning.
9. Arabic: alms.
10. Hindi: settlement, usually of temporary or poor housing, i.e. touring the settlement.
11. Ninth month of the Muslim calendar, the month of daytime fasting.
12. This packet resembles the *kayamba* of the Burungi, Luguru, Ngoni, Sukuma, and other peoples of Tanzania. The seeds rattle between two layers of reeds stitched together to make a packet, shaken with both hands, the thumbs playing additional rhythms (Martin 1998: 638). The *kayamb* is still played in La Reunion, but is no longer known in India. See 19th and 20th century illustrations of the *kayamb* in playing positions very similar to the Kacch painting (La Selve 1995: 63, 65, 191).
13. The earliest such photographs I found were archived at the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting, taken on Republic Day 1954: 'Siddi Folk Dancers from Hyderabad', negatives #A52hPR 31072, 31074, and 31693.
14. On December 9, 1988, in Shah Auditorium, New Delhi, Sidis participated in the West Zone Theatre Festival as musicians, dancers and actors in *Hashr*, an Urdu play by author/director/lead actor Laique Hussain (b. 1957), a graduate of the National School of Drama. Prior to the performance, an intensive training camp was held in Rajpipla to revise the Sidis' ritual dances for stage presentation and to train them in physical exercises.
15. The recent *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 5: South Asia* mentions Sidis only in a brief reference to Shimoga, Karnataka (Kassebaum 2000: 877). *Volume 1: Africa* (Stone: 1998) does not refer to diasporised Africans at all. *The Middle East, Volume 6* (Danielson et al: 2002) has numerous references to African peoples in the Arabian peninsula, Iraq, the Maghrib, and in Oman.
16. We found two shrines to Gori Pir in Uttara Kannada in 2001, and recorded one song sung to Gori Pir, but did not see the danced rituals and processions the local Sidis described.
17. The four major Sufi orders introduced into India between the 13th and 16th centuries were the Chishtiya, Suhrawardiya, Naqshbandiya and Qadriya. There were also other lesser orders (Qureshi 1986: 91).
18. Baba Ghur is the name used in the 16th century *Arabic History of Gujarat* (ad-Dabbir 1910, 1921).
19. *Qalandars* are mystics, often wandering mendicants, sometimes animal trainers. Sidis often repeat the praises of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sindh in

their *jikrs*, with the recurring refrain 'Mast Qalandar', *mast* meaning 'spiritually intoxicated'. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar was a 13th century dervish who is said to have practiced the whirling, circling dance of dervishes. Large kettledrums beat during the *dammal* dancing by both men and women at his shrine (Sakata 2000: 754, 760).

20. The Bantu root *-goma- becomes *ngoma* in Swahili.
21. One new group in Ahmedabad formed by Danny Myava and Rumanaben Siddi called Siddi Goma Group, composed of boys and young men, has received several awards recently. They have two e-mail addresses: siddigomagroup@yahoo.com as well as siddigomagroup@indiatimes.com.
22. For various 19c accounts of slave dances in East Africa and the Gulf, see Alpers 1983 and 1997. His work on the history of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean continues to include references to music and dance (Alpers 2002).
23. Very few examples of musical bows are known in India today, all unbraced and quite different from the *malunga*. One, the *oana villu* played in ensembles by Nayars of Kerala during Oanam processions, is a struck bow entirely made of bamboo, although iron rods are sometimes used for the 'string'. The other, the *villu* of the Nadar Tamils of Tamilnadu, is a very large struck bow resting on the floor, with a pot resonator and bells, played by 2–3 people to accompany ritual narrative songs. For examples of both forms, see Jairazbhoy and Catlin 1991.
24. Interview and demonstration, Sidi Salam Jaffar, Rajpipla January 1999.
25. The musical bow of the Bembe is called *lungunga*; the musical bow of the Sonde of Kidombo, with gourd resonator and tuning loop, is called *lungungu* (Laurenty 196: 113). The *malongu* is the board zither of the Blese people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Angolans call their braced, gourd-resonated musical bow *mbulumbumba* (Kubik 1979: 34).
26. Erroneously identified as Cubans in the accompanying notes. The name *capoeira* refers to a clearing in the jungle in Portuguese, and has a contested derivation, but Desch-Obi concluded that '...there can be no doubt that *capoeira Angola* is a continuation of the Bantu pugilistic tradition' (Desch-Obi 2000: 212). After slavery was abolished in 1888, *capoeira* changed from a preparation for insurrection to an acrobatic game, and incorporated the musical bow at that time (Kubik 1979: 29).
27. Similar musical bows also survive among Africans imported to Madascar and Reunion islands. See La Selve 1995 [original date of publication 1984]: 53–61 for discussion and images. The Sidi bow often uses a stuffed ring of textile to separate the gourd from the bow, a miniature of the *indoni* worn by women on their heads to carry pots of water. The same technique was observed in one musical bow collected in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and residing in the Royal Museum of Central Africa, Turvuren, Belgium (Laurenty 1960: 16).

28. Afro-Brazilian *capoeira* musicians play a musical bow now called by the Portuguese name *berimbau* or *birimbau*, meaning Jew's harp or guimbard, in recognition of its acoustical properties of overtone use similar to the Jew's harp (Graham 1991: 6). The Portuguese word may possibly be derived from Bantu *imba*, 'song'. (Ortiz 1952-55, cited in Marcuse 1964: 55), The form with the gourd resonator is called *berimbau de barriga* (belly).
29. When Nazir Jairazbhoy, Abdul Hamid Sidi, and I discovered the paucity of *malungas* during our survey of Sidi music in 2002, we were invited to arrange a *malunga* camp in Zainabad in February 2003. The Sidi were very interested, and we commissioned an instrument maker to construct new *malungas* for the participants. An American *berimbau* artist will also participate in the workshops.
30. Turino states, '*Ngoma* is the generic word for drum. There are various types in Zimbabwe, but the tall, single-headed drums used for *ngorombe* are particularly common. These drums are carved from a single tree trunk that is hollowed out. Three cutaways are carved at the bottom to make 'feet' on which the drums stand' (Turino 2000: 159). This allows its voice to emerge from below. They are usually played with the hands by two players in two-pitched pairs, unlike the Sidi drum which is not tuned in pairs, and is usually played singly by one or two drummers. Turino also attests to the widespread distribution of such footed drums in South Africa. 'The kind of drum I describe in my book is the most common type in Zimbabwe, but is also widespread in Southern Africa' (Turino e-mail August 8, 2002).
31. Possibly from Urdu *mukarram*, honoured, respected, revered; noble, august, illustrious (Platts 1911: 1058) + *man*, 'having the attributes of'.
32. Twenty-one examples of footed drums from The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ruanda-Burundi may be seen in Boone 1951. None had pegged skins. Feet were cut away from the hollowed logs by square or v-shaped cutaways, and some had curving legs. The one with a circular cut was called *empila* and was collected from Baloie, Dist. Equateur, Bomana: see Boone 1951, Plate IV.
33. In Bedi, Saurashtra, the *mujawar* then cut a fruit into four pieces and cast them into the four cardinal directions (Field notes, January 2002). In stage performances the first dancer may also perform *bhumi puja*, a Hindu ritual gesture (Sanskrit: *puja*, prayer) of touching the earth (Sanskrit: *bhumi*) and then the chest and eyes before entering the stage (Field notes, Vapi January 2001).
34. Marcuse clarifies that the *coboro* [*kebero*] heads differ in diameter, unlike the *musindo*.
35. Kubik notes a parallel tendency of similar Angolan and Portuguese musical traits that '...reinforced each other in Brazil' (author's emphasis) (Kubik 1979: 22).
36. The Hausa *ganga* is played in this position (Marcuse 1964: 199).

37. Such a performance recorded at the main Gori Pir shrine may be heard on Catlin 2002.
38. During the 10th–11th centuries Mahmud of Ghazni (from present-day Afghanistan) made 17 raids in India to destroy Hindu centres in the name of Islam. The 16th raid was in Saurashtra where Nagarci Pir's tomb is located (Smith 1964: 205–208).
39. Various shaken, seed-filled rattles made of gourd or coconut are known by the generic Swahili term *manyanga* in Tanzania, and are used in trance rites (Martin 1998: 638).
40. '...three-part interlocking is common elsewhere in East and Central Africa: in *ngoma* drumming by Wagogo women (central Tanzania), in women's drumming during girls' initiation ceremonies (*cinamwali cha akazi*, in Malawi), and in the *ngwayi* drumming of the Bemba of Zambia, where the principle of interlocking first came to outsiders' attention (Jones 1934: 2)' (Kubik 1998: 312).
41. African children often used verbal mnemonics to learn time-lines (Kubik 1979: 14). These repeating cycles also resemble the Indian *tal* system, perhaps another example of Kubik's 'reinforcement' of similar traits (Kubik 1979: 22).
42. The word *tambol* may be related to the Swahili *tamba*, to strut, to lead dancing, as in returning from a victory, and *tambo*, strutting, swaggering (personal communication from Tom Hinnebusch, 13 August 2002). *Tambol* as played in Gondal may be heard on Catlin 2002, with dancers repeating the word '*tambola*' during the refrains.
43. The black slave converted to Islam and the first reciter of the *azan* call to prayer, who was favoured by the Prophet.
44. A plucked lute, as described by several informants.
45. Personal communications from linguist Tom Hinnebusch, August 2002.
46. For examples of women's songs, see Catlin 2002.
47. My research was supported by a Senior Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies, which I gratefully acknowledge here.
48. In Hindi, this is a reference to a popular film song, and it always got applause.
49. A Sidi who became the treasurer for the Maharaja of Bhavnagar. His sons were schooled in medicine with the support of the Maharaja, and their six sons continue to practice medicine today.
50. Details are to be ironed out, but our understanding is that Apsara Media will donate all proceeds from sales outside India of the 79-minute CDs (Catlin 2002) to a Sidi Trust Fund to be established in India. Cassettes will be sold in India by the Sidi communities represented on the CD: Gori Pir Hill, Rajpipla, Gondal, Jambur, Jamnagar, and Jamnagar ti Bedi.
51. Khajuraho was a minor pilgrimage site for a few hundred people per year until the Government of India developed it into a site of cultural tourism in the 1960's. It now receives a vast number of tourists, foreign and domestic, and the tiny

village has been transformed by the economic impact, including the building of large and small hotels, souvenir and tour guide industries, and related growth, simultaneously enriching and corrupting all (see Ichaporia 1982).

52. I have participated as curator of the programme, author of programme notes, as well as in the preparations for the tour, and will accompany them as cultural liaison, interpreter, and presenter.
53. The tour is sponsored by Asian Music Circuit, a London-based organisation supported by the Arts Council of England. The series called 'Music of the Mystics' is their first to enter the ground pioneered by the Fez Festival of Morocco and the global World Festival of Sacred Music, first launched worldwide in 2000.
54. While this volume was with the publishers, a group of 16 Sidi students and five masters met in February 2003 for a nine-day camp dedicated to the study and revival of the disappearing *malunga* musical bow. The highly successful first tour of England and Wales (October 2002) resulted in additional performances in New Delhi for the World Sufi Music Festival (March 2003), and international tour to Tanzania and Kenya (Zanzibar, Mombasa, and Nairobi in July 2003), Stockholm (October 2003), and Sevilla (October 2003), where the group was highly acclaimed at the World Music Exposition. Their first tour outside India forms the conclusion of the documentary video, *From Africa to India: Sidi Music of the Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Van Nuys: Apsara Media 2003). We return to Gujarat in Winter 2003/4 to assess the social impact of this sudden rise to global recognition, and to collaborate further, especially in educational projects that will involve women and children.
55. I am most grateful to Ned Alpers for his critical reading of this text and his many suggestions for Indian Ocean and African resources, as well as to Helen Rees and Nazir Jairazbhoy for their helpful comments.

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The Sidis of Gujarat and the Quest for Human Dignity

A Concluding Note

Jayanti Patel

Gujaratis are found all over the world. Similarly, various races and people have come to Gujarat and settled happily in this ancient land. This migration from and to Gujarat is facilitated by its geographic position. Gujarat has a considerable stretch of sea coast allowing it access to the countries fringed on the Arabian Sea, like west Asia and Africa, since the pre-historic period. We have an ancient port at Lothal, a site of the Mohenjo-Daro civilisation—and evidence of trade across the sea. Also, races coming by land routes through the passes of the Himalayas had access to Gujarat through the corridors of Rajasthan, Sindh, and Kacch. Africans, Parsis, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch, and British came by sea routes while Scythians, Shakas, Huns, and other central Asians, Mesopotamians, and even Greeks came by the land routes. The ancestors of the Sidis came by both these routes.

Looking at the socio-cultural map of India one could easily divide it into two significant categories. One consists of largely agricultural and tradition-bound societies that support a strong, powerful state. The other, the coastal regions, subsists on maritime commerce, which has made interaction between indigenous and foreign people not only unavoidable but also progressively profitable. This accounts for the comparative openness and liberal outlook of the coastal people, as also the absence of social and religious animosity among them. The need for a powerful imperial state barely touched them (Gupta 1991: ix).

The Sidi are a microscopic community dispersed over various parts of India. However, their main concentration is found on the west coast and particularly in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat and the Uttara

Kannada district in Karnataka. Their largest concentration is in Gujarat, its population being approximately ten thousand.

Sidis came to India as traders, mendicants, slaves and soldiers with invading Muslim armies, with Portuguese as slaves, or Indian traders as domestic servants. They worked as loyal servants, ministers or army commanders. Some of them rose to the status of rulers. Their role in the history of India is not negligible. Razia Sultana, the queen of Delhi, lost her crown because she favoured a Sidi. The Nawabs of Janjira and Jafarabad were Sidis. The famous mosque called Sidi Saiyed Mosque, which is known for its tracery windows, and another known as Sidi Bashir Mosque in Ahmedabad were built by Sidis.

All along the coastal strip, from Diu to the island of Janjira south of Mumbai, Abyssinian or Habshi chiefs and sailors once built a chain of forts to rule the adjoining land and command access to the coast from the sea. They had their own boats, horses and foot soldiers, and we find them offering armed resistance to the Portuguese and Maratha throughout the 17th-18th centuries. The Portuguese wrested Daman from Sidi Bofeta in 1559 (Moniz 2000: 3), but had to retreat before the combined forces of Sidi Marium and Sidi Elal of Diu in 1561-62. Two centuries earlier, the famous traveller-historian Ibn Battuta (1929: 229-30) notes that during his journey from Khambat (Cambay) to Sandabur, 'I myself went on board *Al-Jagir* which had a complement of fifty rowers and fifty Abyssinian men-at-arms. These latter are the guarantors of safety on the Indian Ocean; let there be but one of them on the ship and it will be avoided by the Indian pirates...' Those days of glory are gone. If we look at their present-day life and position in society, perhaps they are the most backward and poor people. Details of the lifestyle and socio-economic position are not so widely known. The percentage of those who had cleared Secondary School in 1961 (Trivedi 1967a and 1967b) was 1.2 per cent (only one of them female). Now there may be some increase, but still the situation is far from satisfactory. Nearly 80 per cent of them are living below the poverty line, while the All-India average is 40 per cent. Their sociopolitical integration in the mainstream is minimal. Considering their backwardness, Sidis were included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes. Peculiarly, Saurashtra Sidis were declared a Scheduled Tribe, but this did not include the Sidis living in Ahmedabad or other areas (see Camara in this volume).

The problem of integration of the Sidis into the Indian mainstream is not simply the problem of a minority community, but a community having a disadvantage, or rather disadvantages, particularly racial, socio-cultural, and economic disabilities. Educational and economic backwardness is reinforced by two other factors. Firstly, they have distinctive ethnic features that set them apart. Science may be informing us that all of us share the same mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), possibly inherited from an African woman (Gore 1997). But people do not easily mix with people having different ethnic features. A second factor is the social structure of Indian society within which they are living. Hindus are a highly caste-conscious and hierarchical society. In this socio-cultural structure and milieu it is very difficult to acquire upward mobility and human dignity.

The illiteracy and poverty of the Sidis must be eradicated for their wellbeing and existence as human beings. Percolation of political consciousness amongst them may motivate them to be a part of the democratic society. But as a humanist I value their dignity as human beings. My concern is not confined merely to the intellectual and academic realm, but it also emanates from my basic faith in the humanist and egalitarian socio-cultural and economic order. I am not interested in preserving them as a museum piece or a freak in the social history of the nation. This requires a change in attitude, accepting them on the basis of equality, respecting their rights and giving recognition to their cultural existence as well as their own desire to assert their dignity. This can be achieved through the cultivation of rational and scientific approaches along with a respect for human dignity. And this is not impossible in the social life of Gujarat because it has a tradition of tolerance and assimilation with other cultures and people.

I take this opportunity to express my sense of gratitude to the trustees of the Shri L.N. Trust, Maharajashri Raghuvir Singh, Maharanishri Rukmani Devi, Yuvarajshri and their staff for their kind hospitality. The Rajpipla conference was evidence of their academic and cultural interest. By organising this conference they provided a baronial venue for an interaction among scholars interested in the problem of the Sidis. Particularly the Maharaja and Maharani have proven that they are still *raja-ranjayati praja*, that is, the one who looks after not only the pleasures but also the welfare, happiness, satisfaction and advancement of their people.

It is unfortunate that in this land of openness, tolerance, and liberalism, the forces of communalism, fundamentalism, and jingoism have reached such heights during the last decades. They are well organised, aggressive, and exhibit fascist tendencies. We have to resist them and re-establish the tradition of openness and humanism so that minority communities can be blended in the brotherhood of a universal human society.

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Contributors

Imtiaz Ahmad, former Professor of Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, received training in social anthropology at Lucknow University and in sociology at University of Delhi, India. He has been Fulbright Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, USA, and Visiting Professor at Ecole de Haute en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and International University for People's Initiatives in Peace, Rovereto, Italy. His academic interests include sociology of Muslim communities in India, communalism and contemporary developments in Islam in India.

Edward A. Alpers, Ph.D., is Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has also taught at the Universities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1966–68), and the Somali National University, Lafoole (1980). In 1994 he served as President of the African Studies Association, the largest international scholarly association devoted to the study of Africa. He has published widely on the history of East Africa and the Indian Ocean and is currently writing a political economy of eastern Tanzania in the 19th century. He is also engaged in research on the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean. His major publications include *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa* (1975), *Walter Rodney: Revolutionary and Scholar*, co-edited with Pierre-Michel Fontaine (1982), and *History, Memory and Identity*, co-edited with Vijayalakshmi Teelock (2001).

Helene Basu, Ph.D., is Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology, Free University of Berlin. Her research engages with popular and transnational religion, gender and cultural constructions

of history/memory in South Asia (Hindu and Muslim) as well as in diasporic settings. She has published the first ethnography on Sidi ways of life in Gujarat. Another major study is concerned with practices of female ascetics that are contextualised in regional productions of genealogical knowledge.

Kuldeep K. Bhan, Ph.D., is Reader in the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara. He teaches Cultural Anthropology, South Asian Archaeology, Ethnoarchaeology, and Experimental Archaeology. At present he is engaged in writing a book on the craft and technology of the Indus Valley civilisation along with Prof. J.M. Kenoyer and Dr. Massimo Vidale. Recently he curated a temporary exhibition on the above theme in the Departmental Museum. During the last five years Bhan has been excavating an important Harappan site on the Gulf of Kacch in Gujarat, India.

Charles Camara is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, engaged with writing his thesis about social changes and ethnic identity among the Siddis of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka, South India. At present he is the Asia Desk Officer at Caritas Sweden, mainly working with capacity building of NGOs and income-generating projects among Dalit women in South India.

Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, Ph.D., is Visiting Associate Professor and Research Associate in the Department of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She teaches courses on the classical and non-classical musics of South and Southeast Asians and Asian-Americans, field methodology, ethnographic film, music and the sacred, and applied and public sector ethnomusicology. Amy's research, writing, teaching, curating and multi-media publications often have an applied focus aimed at community development of minority traditions, especially in diasporic settings. She presented the first Sidi concert and lecture tour outside India with a group of Sidi performers from Gujarat, travelling with them in England and Wales in 2002.

Henry John Drewal, Ph.D., is Evjue-Bascom Professor of Art History and Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He studies the arts of Africa especially among Yoruba-speaking

peoples, and the African diasporas of Brazil, Puerto Rico, Panama, Mexico and most recently, India. He has written many articles and several books and is currently organizing an exhibition on the arts for water spirits in the Afro-Atlantic world.

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, Ph.D., Professor in Anthropology, teaches archaeology and ancient technology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His main focus is on the Indus Valley civilisation and he has worked in Pakistan and India for the past 27 years. He has a special interest in ancient technologies and crafts, which has led him to study a broad range of cultural periods in South Asia, including the agate bead makers and Sidi communities of Gujarat.

Prita Sandy Meier is a Ph.D. candidate in the History of Art and Architecture Department of Harvard University. Prita's dissertation research focuses on 19th and early 20th century urbanscapes on the Swahili coast and how architectural forms and concepts were accessed by various individuals and groups to engender particular readings of history and identity.

Pashington Obeng, Ph.D., is assistant professor of Africana Studies at Wellesley College and Harvard University. His teaching areas include Images of Africana People through Cinema, Religion and Culture in Africa, Afro-Atlantic Religions and Cultures, and Neglected Africans of the Diaspora. Obeng's research ranges from anthropology of religion to diaspora studies with a specific focus on the intertwining relationship of cosmologies and lifeways of African Indians (Siddis) of Karnataka, South India. Obeng was educated at the University of Ghana, Legon, Trinity College, and Cape Coast University. His further studies include Carleton University, Ottawa, Princeton Seminary, Boston University, Harvard University, and Oxford University. Obeng is the author of *Asante Catholicism: Religious and Cultural Reproduction Among the Akan of Ghana* and other monographs and articles.

Jayanti K. Patel, M.A. (Political Science) is a retired faculty member of the School of Social Sciences, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. A founder member and past vice-president of the African Studies Society of India (ASSI), he is currently President of the Indian Radical Humanist Association, an affiliate of the International Ethical Humanism Association (IEHU). He has written articles on African politics and development, and his research and publications on the

Sidis of Gujarat were motivated by concern for their human rights, their difficult position in society, and their need for economic upliftment.

Beheroze Shroff, M.A., M.F.A. (English, and Film and Television Production) is a documentary filmmaker who teaches part time in the Asian American Studies Department of the University of California, Irvine. Shroff's films and videos have explored several issues concerning women. *Sweet Jail: The Sikhs of Yuba City* deals with issues of immigration and gender in the pioneering Sikh community of California. *Reaching For Half the Sky* focuses on women's groups in India, and *A Life Before Death* explores the sexual exploitation of *joginis* in a region of Andhra Pradesh. *Voices of the Sidis—Part One* is her recently completed twenty-one minute video in a series that will explore the life of Sidis in Gujarat.



Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy is Visiting Associate Professor and Research Associate in the Department of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research, writing, teaching, curating and multi-media publications often have an applied focus aimed at community development of minority traditions, especially in diasporic settings.

Edward A. Alpers is Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has also taught at the Universities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1966-1968), and the Somali National University, Lafoole (1980). His major publications include *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, *Walter Rodney: Revolutionary and Scholar*, co-edited with Pierre-Michel Fontaine, and *History, Memory and Identity*, co-edited with Vijayalakshmi Teelock.

This exciting collection of essays brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines to explore the history and present circumstances of one of India's least known minority groups, the African Indians.

Following the editors' introduction which covers the scholarly literature on Africans in India and an historical overview that looks at the larger history of Africans in India, the essays focus on two different communities of African Indians, the Sidis of Gujarat (including those in Bombay) and the Siddis of Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. They illumine various aspects of the life of Sidis in contemporary India, their worship at the Sufi shrine of Gori Pir, their music and dance, their liminal existence and their agonising dilemmas and predicament in the complex mosaic that is present-day India.

Co-edited by an ethnomusicologist of India and an historian of Africa, the contributors include specialists in anthropology, archaeology, art history, religious studies and film from Ghana, Sweden, Germany, the United States and India. Together, they bring to bear their wealth of research experience and scholarship in Africa and India on the fascinating and varied experience of Indians of African origin.

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